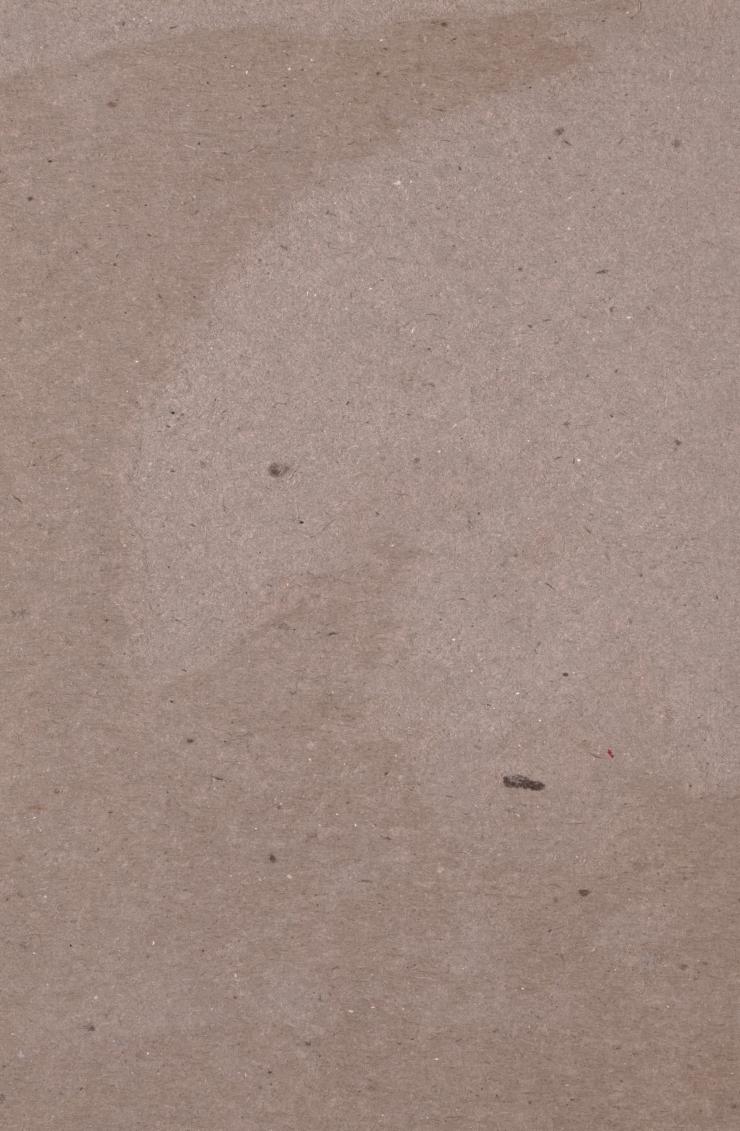
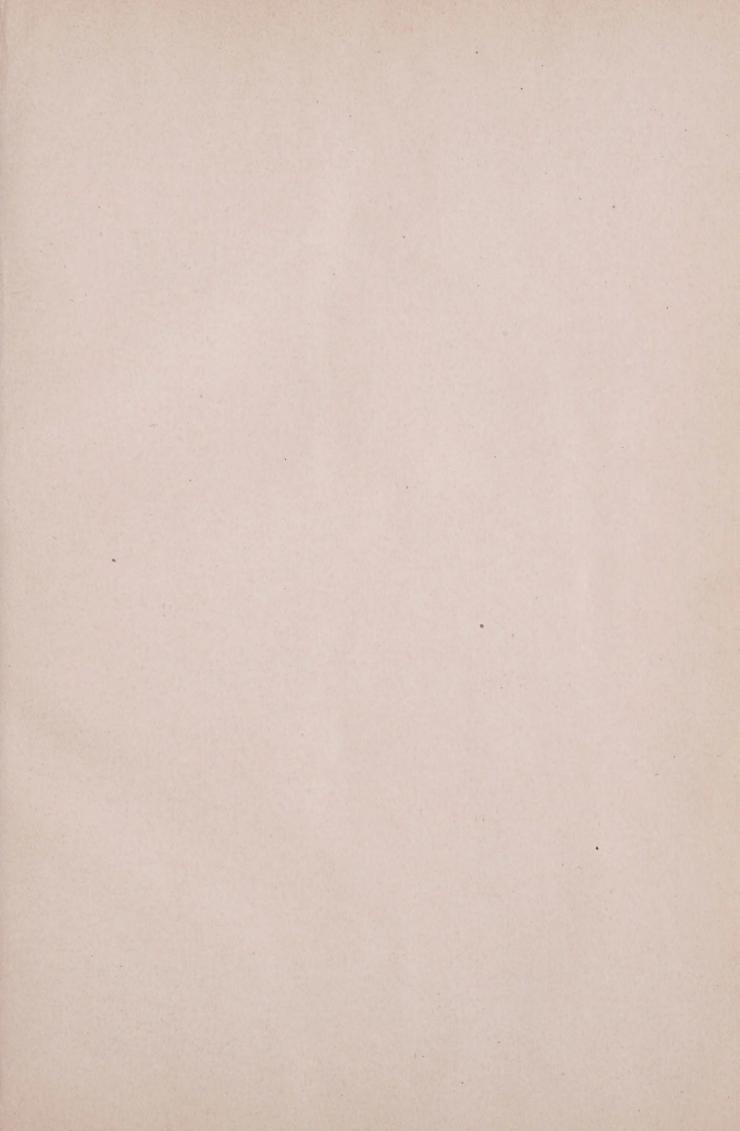
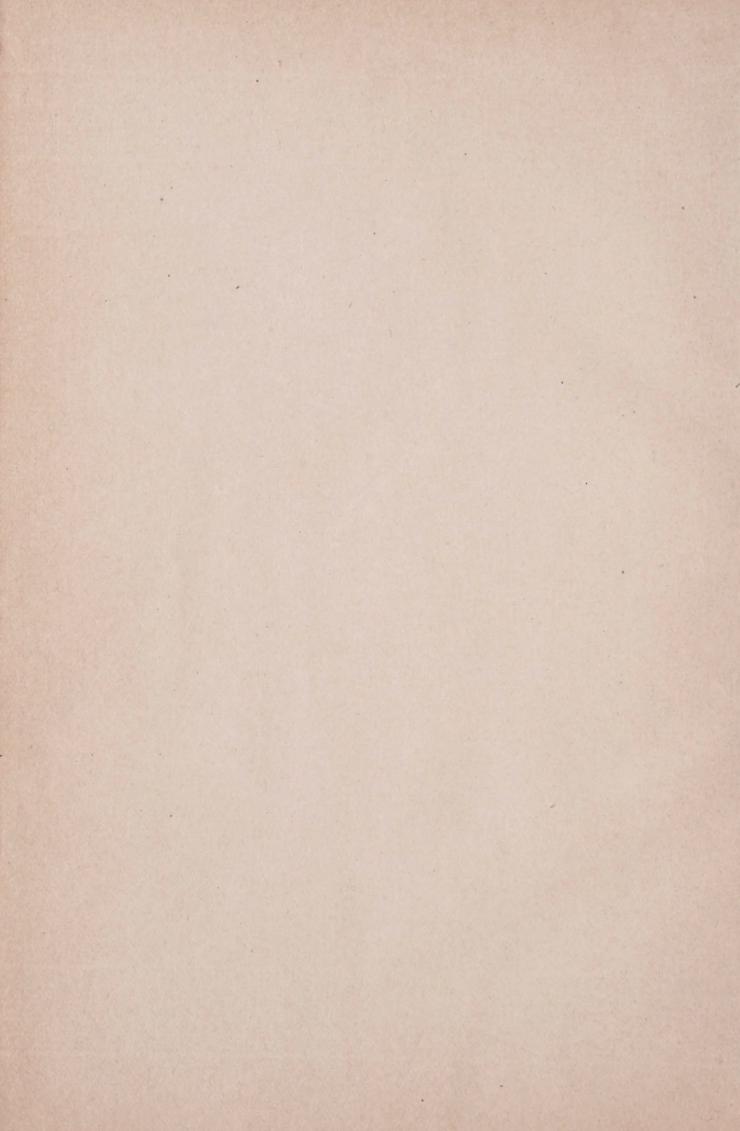
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A NOVEL

BY

ROBERT LEE TYLER



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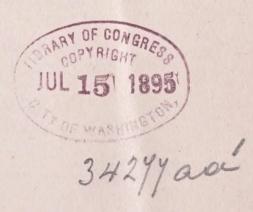
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A DAUGHTER OF DELILAH.

BOOK ONE.

THE SIREN DANSEUSE.

CHAPTER I.

A FALSE TELEGRAM.

It was a clear, crisp, February night. There was no moon, but the sky was filled with stars, amber, pale-blue and deep-gold; beautiful stars that flashed a mellow radiance over all the purple dome. The air was keen and cold, and the earth as hard as a rock under the magical touch of its biting breath.

Within an arrow-shot of Bridgley depot, and in the shadow of the echoing woods, a young man was singing a bacchanalian song, his full baritone voice rising and falling in graceful undulations of perfect melody.

"Wreathe the bowl with flowers of soul,
The brightest Wit can find us;
We'll take a flight toward heaven to-night,
And leave dull earth behind us!
Should Love amid the wreaths be hid,
That Joy, the enchanter, brings us,
No danger fear while wine is near,
We'll drown him if he stings us;

Then, wreathe the bowl with flowers of soul,
The brightest Wit can find us,
We'll take a flight toward heaven to-night,
And leave dull earth behind us!

"Twas nectar fed of old, 'tis said,
Their Junos, Joves, Apollos;
And man may brew his nectar, too,
The rich receipt's as follows:
Take wine like this, let looks of bliss
Around it well be blended,
Then bring Wit's beam to warm the stream,
And there's your nectar, splendid!
So wreathe the bowl with flowers of soul,
The brightest Wit can find us;
We'll take a flight toward heaven to-night,
And leave dull earth behind us!"

He stopped singing, and looked half doubtfully at the glimmering lights of the station; then, as though reassured, exclaimed:

"Yes, this is it. No train yet for half an hour, anyway. I've had enough of the ambrosial nectar of the gods, and at this moment could do with something a little more solid."

He shivered in the cold night air, for over an immaculate evening attire he only wore a light-gray waterproof, and his crushed hat was very much crushed indeed.

"Cursed piece of trickery!" he muttered, wrathfully, as he crunched a telegram between his powerful fingers. "I can appreciate a joke, but if I find out who has perpetrated this——"

He broke into a laugh.

"Of course it could not be Hawley. Absurd to connect him with such buffoonery! Now, I wonder what my sedate old dad would think if he knew of the latest escapade of his elegant son and heir, Edgar Alston!"

He laughed again, and ran lightly up the steps to the station, the flame from a large oil-lamp revealing the figure of a fine-looking young fellow, tall, straight, and handsome. The eyes were dark and brilliant, a little too brilliant, perhaps; the face was regular in its outline, but the classical beauty was half lost by the strong evidence in every feature of self-indulgence. The delicate curves round the severely straight nose were too deep for a man of eight-and-twenty, and to-night Edgar Alston's face wore that unmistakable flush that is neither the glow of health nor exercise. He had been drinking wine rather freely at a countryside hotel a mile or so from Bridgley.

"How long have I to wait for the next train to Cincinnati?" he said, thrusting his head into the ticket-office.

"Last train gone, sir," replied the station-agent, locking his desk and shutting down the light in the office.

"But I must get there to-night, at once!" Edgar cried.
"Hang it, man, what am I to do? I was told that there was a train at ten o'clock."

"Then you were told wrong," was the answer of the imperturbable station-agent. This was not the first time that he had seen a man angry at losing a train.

He walked out of his office, slammed to the door, and waited, jingling a bunch of keys.

"I must get to Cincinnati to-night," Edgar went on.
"Isn't there a carriage to be hired—or—or—anything?"

"No, sir; we have no use for such things at Bridgley. Pardon me, I'm just locking up. See here," he added, "your only plan is to walk to Covington, and it's easy enough to get to Cincinnati from there. You had better follow the track and go through the tunnel. Are you afraid of tunnels?"

"I'm afraid of nothing," was the quick retort.

"Well, the tunnel is half a mile through, and I don't mind if I loan you a lantern. Give it up at Covington, and it'll get back to me all right. You can take this one." He pointed to a lantern standing against the wall. "And keep on the right-hand track! There's nothing behind you until eleven o'clock," he went on, consulting his watch, "but an express leaves Covington in twenty minutes. Don't get in her way, sir!"

Alston laughed lightly.

"I am much obliged to you," he said, snatching up the lantern, "and you need have no fear for me. My nerves are well steeled! I'll give this up at the Covington depot, and tell the agent to send it back to you. I won't forget your kindness in a hurry. I would face the devil himself, and all the lesser imps, rather than fail to get back to Cincinnati to-night."

He nodded brightly, and turned away, singing to himself the refrain of his late song:

"So wreathe the bowl with flowers of soul,
The brightest Wit can find us;
We'll take a flight toward heaven to-night,
And leave dull earth behind us!"

"The right-hand track!" called the station-agent, watching Alston's tall figure. The light in the lantern swayed and flickered as he moved onward, and the huge shadow that fluttered after him looked like a grotesque giant from the lower regions.

"He isn't exactly sober," the station-agent thought, "and maybe I've done wrong in putting him onto this racket. Well, I suppose that these sporty young bloods will have their day, and he'll be safe in the tunnel from tramps, anyway. A New Yorker, every inch of him, I'll wager!"

In answer to the man's last cry of caution, Edgar Alston waved the lantern. He quite understood the danger, and not one man in a hundred would have faced a black tunnel at any time, much less at night.

"If this is taking a flight toward heaven," he thought, grimly, "the way is much darker than we are taught to believe! I have followed the track out West for a hundred miles at a stretch, but I never remember facing a tunnel more than a hundred yards through."

He burst into song again, and his rapid movements sent a warm glow through every vein. He felt the wine in his blood, in his heart, in his head. His perceptions were blurred, but he was utterly insensible to fear.

He looked behind, and the station lights glimmered like glow-worms. Before him was a mountain of rocks, above which a young moon was just rising, and at the same moment he plunged into a cutting whose iron-clamped walls were as black as ebony.

"We'll take a flight toward heaven to night, And leave dull earth behind us!"

Alston murmured.

"By Jove! This looks more like taking a trip to inferno!" he added, with a laugh that was thrown back from the black walls, and the blacker gulf beyond, in many solemn echoes.

He set down the lantern to button his coat tightly about him, for the mouth of the tunnel seemed to vomit forth a blast as cold as ice.

"One more look at that idiotic telegram," he muttered, drawing from his pocket a piece of crumpled paper, and spreading it out on his knee. "Surely, I made no mistake! What on earth will my sister Minnie think? And as for

my respected aunt, she has already gone through every known stage of hysterics! No matter; I can explain all when I get home. What the devil brings me out of civilization I can't understand! But I suppose every fellow who has a rich aunt is forced into purgatory occasionally."

He glanced at the telegram, which he had no difficulty in deciphering, for the contents had already eaten into his brain in letters of fire.

"EDGAR ALSTON, Esq., care of Mrs. Radcliffe, Bellevue avenue, Cincinnati:—Go to the Stars and Stripes Hotel, Bridgley, at once. This is a matter of life and death. You are only an hour's journey away. Let nothing detain you, or it will cause you and me life-long regret. ISABEL."

This precious missive had been dispatched from a New York up-town office, and the name attached was that of the loveliest houri who ever sang before the foot-lights—a paradisean nymph, whose word or glance had power sufficient to send Edgar Alston into throes of ecstasy or despair.

"No," decided Alston. "Queenie never sent that thing." Queenie was the pet name of the new prima-donna, the fairy danseuse, whose grace of form, whose witching eyes, had enslaved a good score of New York's wealthiest young men.

"No, Queenie never sent that thing. It is an infernal hoax, and if I discover the perpetrator, by the Eternal! he shall know what it is to quarrel with Edgar Alston!"

His eyes flashed ominously, and more than one oath dropped from his lips.

"And her name to be used, too! Of course, I cannot show the telegram to Minnie. She would want to know all about Isabel, and would at once tumble to the fact that there must be some all-potent power in the dear name to

drag a fellow miles from home on a night like this, attired as I am! What a wild-goose chase! By Jove! I shall have to put my inventive faculties to work! Any stuff would do for my aunt, bless her innocent soul! But Minnie isn't to be cajoled quite so easily!"

In obedience to the command—the entreaty—contained in the telegram, he had hastened to Bridgley, without waiting to make a reasonable explanation to either his aunt or sister. The potent name of Isabel utterly effaced them, and it only occurred to him now how bitter would be their disappointment at losing an escort who had engaged a box at the opera for them that very day. This, however, might be partially, if not wholly, allayed by their anxiety concerning his eccentric behavior.

He had hastened to Bridgley, and having a smart tongue in his head, was not long in finding that there indeed was such a place as the Stars and Stripes Hotel. It was situated a good mile from the station, amidst a wild bit of country, and Edgar had been effusively welcomed by the proprietor, for business at this period of the year was notoriously slow. In his sanguine heart he hoped that the young gentleman might be the advance guard of an aristocratic party who had tired of the glamours of the town.

But he was soon undeceived by being permitted to read the telegram, while Alston kept the name of Isabel carefully covered.

"I have no idea what it means, sir," he said, dubiously; "but," with rising hope, "it is very likely—indeed, it is certain—that somebody intends to meet you here, and I am sure that I can make you comfortable for any length of time."

"Perhaps Queenie herself is coming!" was the thought that flashed through Alston's mind, and a burning, happy thrill made his heart bound. "If she is in trouble, I will risk my immortal soul to help her!"

He called for wine, to which he helped himself freely, and dreamed happy dreams of the woman who had bewitched his very being.

Then he became impatient. Why had he not taken the precaution to telegraph in reply to Isabel's message? Two hours passed, and he half staggered to his feet, but the wine had made him hilarious.

"I must return to my friends in Cincinnati," he told the landlord. "Here is my address, if any one comes to meet me. Telegraph me at once, and I will repay you. It may be a pleasant hoax on the part of some fellows in New York," he added, "and I shall have to get level with them!"

He went away with a good deal of devilment in his heart, but it was soon forgotten under the generous influence of the wine he had imbibed. He sang many songs by the lonely way, and some of them would have brought a blush to beauty's cheek. He had picked them up during wild midnight orgies in an underground slum not a stone's throw from Madison Square Garden; ugly ditties paraphrased from the wanton rubbish which the habitue of the music hall considered delectable fare, when trilled from the lips of some painted and shameless jade under the glitter of a thousand lights—under the glamour of spangle and sheen, to the strains of voluptuous music, which was ever welcome to the senses of the lewd.

He thought of Isabel Russell, and his tongue was em-

ployed by loftier themes. He believed in the goodness and purity of this woman as devoutly as in the virtue of the angels. He worshiped her far beyond his own salvation, and yet, accursed fate!—he was forced to meet her in secret. He was but a useless dependent upon a father as rich as Crœsus, a father who showered money upon him with a lavish hand, who was perhaps indulgent beyond reason, where his handsome son's petty vices were concerned, but who could be as hard and unyielding as a rock when he chose.

"Edgar," he had said, "when you are sated with the follies of youth, I will unfold my views for your future. I am a rich man, the architect of my own fortunes, a magnate, a Cæsar, if you will, whose word is enough to thrill the whole financial world. I am a proud man—I am an ambitious man, and have dreams of a title for your sister—an alliance for yourself with some noble family. My money will buy these things. Remember, I can forgive anything but entanglements with low women!"

Edgar thought of these words now and shivered. He had treated them lightly at the time, but to-night they rang in his ears like the knell of doom.

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CHAPTER II.

IN THE TUNNEL.

The black mouth of the tunnel yawned before him, and there was a melancholy sound in the wind that gushed from its cavernous depths. On either side the giant rocks piled a hundred feet in the air, their frosted summits gleaming brightly in the starlight. Below everything was black, but the two tracks of shining steel rails that seemed to vanish in the tunnel's awful abyss, over which rested a million tons of earth. The scene was Dantesque, and though Alston was not blessed, or cursed, with the most vivid imagination, he fancied that a hundred shadowy and grotesque creatures of the evil world were rushing forth to warn him back, only to quickly dissolve in the clear, cold air.

"Merely the smoke from the last engine being driven out," he soliloquized, "and the light playing upon it makes fantastic shadows. The sulphurous odor proves that. Well, here goes!"

He plunged into the inky darkness, and it seemed that the wind there had redoubled force and keenness.

"The right-hand track! I must remember that," he growled, after stumbling along for five minutes. "At best, this is a fool-hardy piece of work!"

He flashed his lantern at the reeking walls, and they glistened dully in the faint light. Now and again would

be heard the scurrying of some frightened rat, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that he came upon an embrasure, that shielded him from the cutting blast.

"An express train from Covington in twenty minutes," he thought, remembering the station-agent's words. "Well, if it is on time it will be here soon, and then for a little more smoke and sulphur."

He pushed onward, for the sense of loneliness was awful, then uttered an exclamation of rage and dismay. He had stepped into a hole, and fallen with the lantern underneath him. He was in utter darkness now, and began to grope his way by keeping his right hand in constant contact with the wall.

"Half a mile through! I should think that I am very near to the other end," he muttered. "And yet I see no outlet—not the faintest sign of one."

He turned his back to the onrushing wind for a moment, but suddenly started round again.

Hark! was not that the far-away whistle of a train? The hoarse scream burst upon his ears like a thunder-crash! The express had just entered the tunnel! The rails quivered like living things, and the earth rocked until he half feared that the tunnel would collapse about him.

A great red eye evolved from the blackness, and swept forward, followed by the noise of many thunders. He watched it with a fascination that was almost fatal. He saw only this, and two glowing shadows that encompassed it like mighty wings.

"My God!" he groaned. "It is heading straight for me! It will bear me down! Keep to the right!" He clutched at the slimy walls. "I am to the right—I am on the down track, but that infernal monster fills up every inch of space!"

On it came with a snort, a shriek, and a roar, with a noise that all the unloosed demons of the infernal regions would fail to imitate. The earth trembled, the rails gleamed before the savage eye of fire like writhing, molten snakes, and Alston flung himself to the earth in a frenzy of fear, as the monster swept along. He saw the open jaws of a roaring furnace, from whose lurid depths was flung a glow that girdled the tunnel round—that shone on the faces of two men—the engineer and the fireman—who looked like exultant, grimy fiends as they flashed by.

In thirty seconds the express was gone. Its mocking screams were half a mile away, and Edgar Alston was upon the point of scrambling to his feet again when he was astounded by the sound of a human voice!

"Keep still, sir, if you value your life!" were the words that rang in his ears.

"Who the devil may you be?" demanded Alston.

"Never mind who I am," was the savage retort. "Let it be sufficient that I have you covered with a six-shooter, which I shall use unless you are willing to listen to reason. Hold there, blast you! I can hear you fumbling for a light, and, by the living God, I'll shoot you dead if you strike a match! You are at my mercy, and this is the chance of my life! I am a fool to run any risks, when I have only to touch the trigger to put an end to all doubts and fears! No one can interfere, and your body would be cleaned away by the rats long before—"

"You need not conjure up all the horrors of your pleasant imagination," Alston coolly interrupted. "I am sitting perfectly still, and being unarmed, I am quite at your mercy. I confess that I did feel in my pockets for a match, but no such commodity is at hand. Even if I had one, I would respect your wishes under the circumstances—because you have me at a disadvantage."

There was a hoarse laugh in response.

"Now, my good friend," continued Alston, "as I am reclining in a puddle of mud, will you kindly tell me your wishes? I do not care to remain here one moment longer than is necessary."

"You swear that you are unarmed?"

"I do, most solemnly. You have free permission to make a search, and if you find anything more formidable than a penknife, I give you the right to shoot."

"I am satisfied. I have the word of a gentleman," said the voice in the gloom. "Now jump up, and I will let you know what I want."

Edgar obeyed.

"Your name?" demanded the strange assailant.

"Edgar Alston, of New York," with mock politeness.

"What are you doing here?"

"I wished to reach Cincinnati to-night, and there was no train from Bridgley, so I elected to walk. What next, my Grand Inquisitor?"

The man breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am glad that I did not kill you," he said, at length.
"Do you know, sir, that I lay for several minutes waiting for you? I thought that you were a blood-hound on my track! I crouched here like a tiger, ready to launch you into eternity! I waited till the engine passed, and the glow from the furnace revealed you to me. I leveled my

pistol, I pulled the trigger, but it snapped fire! In that brief moment your face was photographed into my soul; but, God be thanked, I am not a murderer!"

Alston could not resist a smile.

"Now, if we had a light on the scene," he said, "I should imagine that the effect would be highly melodramatic!"

"It would mean your death!" was the harsh rejoinder.
"Listen, sir! I am a fugitive fleeing from justice—or what
the accursed law calls justice. I have been in hiding here
for thirty-six hours, never dreaming of a chance like this
to effect my escape—to throw the blood-hounds off my
track."

"Well?" demanded Alston, for his companion had paused. "I have no wish to——"

"Silence, sir! These are my wishes—my commands: You must disrobe at once. We are going to exchange clothing, and you know, sir, that a fair exchange is no robbery!"

He laughed exultantly, adding:

"Quick! quick! There is no time to lose. If you value your clothes they shall be returned to you; I promise you that. And you must loan me a little money. Every cent shall be sent to you within a week."

"I suppose that I have no choice but to obey," grumbled Edgar, "considering that I am at the wrong end of a six-shooter! You won't deprive me of my overcoat, will you?"

"No; I shall not need it, and you will!"

A hoarse laugh followed this significant reply.

"I am sure that I shall be your eternal debtor," proceeded the man; "and some day may be able to repay your kindness. You have released me from a most trying dilemma, sir. Thanks for the trousers; they fit capitally. We must be much of a size. I hope that mine will be as comfortable, though they are scarcely of such fine material as those you have so kindly lent me. Pardon me, but I believe that I am attired in evening dress? Always very becoming to a man of good stature! Vest and coat fit well, too! Your hat, please. I am sorry that I have nothing to give you in exchange, but I have lost mine. I hope, sir, that you feel as comfortable as I do!"

"You are most kind to leave me the overcoat," Edgar rejoined, ironically. "I think that you want a little money. I have retained my pocket-book and my watch and chain. Do you demand these?"

"By no means," was the courteous and quick reply; "but I shall esteem it a favor if you will let me have, say fifteen or twenty dollars."

"Impossible to say what I am giving you. Here are half a dozen bills, and I know that some of them are fives."

"Thank you; I will return the amount in full if you will give me your address."

"It does not signify," Alston said.

"Nay, sir, I insist!"

"Address me at my club, the Athenian, Fifth avenue, New York," Edgar replied, with a dry laugh.

"I shall not forget, and I shall be eternally grateful to you, Mr. Alston. By the way, you will not think it unkind if I ask you to say as little as you can concerning this adventure? I am sure that I can depend upon the honor of a gentleman. It would be extremely awkward for me if the story reached the police before I could effect another change."

"I do not think that I shall have any inclination to boast about this night's work," was the half-savage retort. "Well, I will wish you good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Alston, good-night. I shall go to Bridgley, while you continue your way to Covington. One word of warning. Keep your overcoat well wrapped about you. It hides a multitude of wickedness. And I would advise you also to hire a cab in Covington, and drive across the bridge home. Your appearance might excite the curiosity of some policeman anxious to distinguish himself, and I have no desire for one so obliging to spend the night in a cell."

Alston did not wait to hear more, but turned savagely on his heel. He half regretted that he had not defied the robber. He was disgusted with himself, for being so easily fooled and frightened—yes, he was forced to confess it—he had been frightened.

"My nerves were completely upset," he told himself. "It is horrible to be assailed by what one cannot see. And yet, if I have done the poor devil a good turn, I shall be the last to regret it."

He paused an instant to listen. Were those footsteps behind him? No! There was no sound but the mournful rush of the wind.

He strove to pierce the gloom, and looked steadily forward. The air was now purer and sweeter; and at last there appeared a tiny globe of shadowy gray, that might have been fifty or five hundred yards distant. His heart bounded with gladness; at last, he was nearing the mouth of the tunnel!

In a few minutes the globe assumed a clearly defined

arch, lights twinkled beyond, and Edgar Alston dashed into the open air with a shout of thankfulness. Above him, a million stars were flashing in a purple sky, and the young moon glittered like a jeweled crescent.

"I would not again suffer a like experience for all the wealth of Wall street," he thought. "I have faced a savage bear single-handed, and been surrounded by a prairie fire; but found real enjoyment in such adventures, compared with the fun of the past half hour. By Jove! I wonder what the boys would say if they knew that I had been held up by one man? Robbed of my purse, and even my clothing, without offering any resistance! By the Eternal!" he added, wrathfully, "I must have been unnerved to submit to it! Still, what was a fellow to do, similarly placed? I would like to meet the infernal scoundrel in the light of day!"

He glanced down at his feet involuntarily, and a cry of disgust and alarm escaped him. He caught sight of the trousers he was wearing; he flung open his coat—yes, the pattern was the same! He was attired in the garb of a convict!

Mr. Edgar Alston, the son of one of New York's greatest financiers, the prospective heir to that financier's enormous wealth, and in consequence the pet of the starchiest matrons who moved in the inner circle of the orbit of the premier city's most select society—Mr. Edgar Alston in a plight like this!

He leaned against a telegraph pole, completely overcome. He might be arrested at any time for an escaped convict, and then the whole of the humiliating story would have to be told. It would go the round of the clubs, and the name of Isabel Russell would be sure to leak out! How could he avoid the swarm of reporters who would be certain to run him, and his miserable story, to earth?

"My duty is clear," he muttered. "I ought to hurry to the nearest police station, and be laughed at! The convict would be caught, for he has not had time to get far away, and——" He paused and gritted his teeth, adding: "No, it shall never be known to a living soul! Let the poor devil go!"

He buttoned his coat tightly about him, and rolled up the trousers at the bottoms to a ridiculous height. Then, assured that little of his convict attire could be seen, he started at a quick pace toward the railway station, whose lights glimmered brightly not half a mile away.

When within a stone's throw of the station, he left the track, and hurried in the direction of a carriage stand, where his hatless head and general appearance of disorder enlisted the sympathies of a friendly policeman.

"Lost your hat, sir?" the man queried.

"Yes, it blew off," Alston replied, readily. "I have walked from Bridgley. Was obliged to get back to Cincinnati to-night, and no confounded train. I shall complete my journey in a carriage. Order one, will you, please?"

The policeman shouted to one of the hackmen, while Alston turned aside to take a douceur from his pocket-book with which to sop the officer's curiosity.

In two minutes he was seated in the carriage, having peremptorily stopped the hackman's argument concerning the lateness of the hour, and the length of a journey which would take him far out of his usual course, by thrusting a ten-dollar bill into his eager hands.

"It'll soon be midnight, sir, and we are due back at the stables at twelve," he said, apologetically, and wishing devoutly that the money had been given to him anywhere but under the keen eye of the policeman.

"Mrs. Radcliffe, Bellevue avenue, Cincinnati," shouted Edgar. "Now then, hurry up!"

The hackman gathered up his lines, the policeman called "Good-night, sir," and the carriage rumbled away.

Until it was lost to sight the officer regarded it thoughtfully. Then he drew out his note-book, and carefully penciled down the address he had heard Edgar Alston give to the hackman.

"He's been on some racket," murmured the man. "Where the duse has his hat gone to? Blowed off, eh? A likely story such a night as this! Tall, dark, and a proper chap for the girls! A real swell, too! Gray waterproof, and trousers rolled up as though he'd been in a swamp. No hat! That completes my inventory. No doubt he takes me for a common, thick-headed cop! Nothing of the kind, sir! I am Detective Nathaniel Hawkley, and if it wasn't for missing my game, I'd keep you in sight."

He paused, and suddenly clapped his hand to his forehead.

"By Heaven! I have it!" he ejaculated. "It may be Gilbert Roseberry himself! He is the cleverest criminal on earth, but he sha'n't hoodwink Nat Hawkley! But the description? Roseberry is fair!"

He was puzzled for a moment, then went on:

"What is easier than for that villain, with all his knowledge of stage-craft, to disguise himself? Under that coat

is a convict suit, and inside the convict suit is Gil Roseberry!"

He quickly selected the best horse in the stand, and ordered the driver to take him to:

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satisfication and the same at the same of the adviser

"Mrs. Radcliffe, Bellevue avenue, Cincinnati!"

CHAPTER III.

"GILBERT ROSEBERRY, YOU ARE MY PRISONER!"

"A lucky escape!" muttered Alston, when the carriage was crawling across the bridge over the Ohio River. "Now for some story to tell my Aunt Radcliffe, and Minnie! But how the duse am I to evade their sharp eyes? I must go indoors quietly, and tell one of the servants to say that I have gone to my room for five minutes to change my shoes, or something of the kind. Then the rest will be comparatively easy!"

These thoughts were somewhat exhilarating after his many unpleasant adventures, and he fell to thinking of Isabel Russell, and her indignation, when she heard how cruelly he had been hoaxed in her name.

"It is a cowardly trick," he thought, "whoever may be guilty of it."

But who could be the guilty person? He began to feel very uncomfortable, and to grow hot and cold by turns. Now that his head was clearing, he began to see that there was an ugly mystery surrounding the affair. If Queenie had not sent the telegram, the secret of his blind passion for her was known to another—to one who would perhaps make trouble between them. So far his only confidant was an old college chum, Edward Hawley, who was too honorable to resort to any stupid nonsense of this kind.

"I am not dolt enough to be blind to the fact that there

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is something behind this devilishly queer," he growled. "And I'll return to New York to-morrow, and find out what it is."

The carriage stopped with a jerk, and the driver bawled: "Bellevue avenue, sir. What number?"

"I will alight here!" announced Alston, adding, to himself. "Happy thought! If Minnie is watching for my return, the sound of carriage wheels would betray me."

He dismissed the driver, and walked rapidly until he came to a large brick house, surrounded by lawns and ornamental flower beds, which occupied an entire block.

Running lightly up the broad steps that led to a noble veranda, he crept with the stealthiness of a thief into the handsome vestibule, that formed a kind of antechamber to the hall beyond.

Through the upper half of the great oaken doors, which were tastefully paneled with stained glass, Alston saw a couple of servants moving idly to and fro, and gently tapped the door with the tips of his fingers.

"Curse them for a pair of fools!" he growled, under his "They evidently imagine that I am a burglar by the terror exhibited in their senseless faces. If I touch the electric bell, of course Minnie and my aunt will be at once upon the scene!"

He rapped the door sharply with his knuckles, and the effect was almost electrical, both servant-men making a bee-line for the kitchen in search of weapons of defense.

Alston's only resource now was to ring the electric bell, and within ten seconds the door was being unlocked and unbarred by his anxious sister.

The moment it was opened, Edgar darted inside, saying:

"If you love me, Minnie, do not let my aunt and the servants see me for ten minutes, anyway! I will tell you everything. I have been hoaxed."

As he fled up stairs, she looked after him half-doubtfully, and a look of terror came into her eyes when she saw the pattern of his nether garments. What folly had he been guilty of now? What did he mean by being hoaxed?

At that moment a stern-faced, elderly lady appeared at the door of a drawing-room, her looks expressive of the most severe displeasure.

"So the truant is back?" she said. "What excuse has he to offer for his abominable conduct? I never passed so anxious a time in my life. I have been bitterly disappointed and grossly insulted, and shall make a point of informing your father all about it. I am almost of opinion that Edgar is not responsible for his actions. The slight is either intentional, or his mind is demented."

"Edgar will explain presently, aunt," Minnie replied, gently. "And I am sure that you will not worry papa by mentioning one word of this affair."

Minnie Alston was a handsome, dark-eyed girl of twenty-two summers—one of Gotham's fairest maids! Her figure was as perfect as that of a sylph, her movements as graceful as though made to rhythmical music. The face was almost Southern in its dark beauty, but in her lustrous eyes was a soft light, seldom seen in the orbs of the passionate daughters of the South. Minnie Alston was a loving, true-hearted girl, and one of her greatest anxieties for months past had been to shield her brother's pecadilloes from their stern father.

Mrs. Radcliffe listened to an apology from the footman

for neglecting to open the door for Mr. Alston, and every word that he said was a stab.

"Being past midnight, ma'am, and as Mr. Alston tapped in a mysterous sort of way, my first thoughts were burlgars, remembering that the Wilsons were only robbed last week and the watch-dog shot on the stoop."

"It is all right, John," his mistress told him; and then the ladies retired into the drawing-room to await Edgar's tardy appearance.

"I really hope that he has not been indulging too freely, my dear," Mrs. Radcliffe said. "Why should he alarm the servants by tapping on the glass? Edgar has changed very much for the worse, lately, and I am not so blind that I have not noticed the quantity of wine he drinks at dinner. And his talk about cocktails and that sort of thing is disgraceful! I wonder that his father does not see as I do."

"Listeners rarely hear any good of themselves," smiled Edgar, walking into the room; "and though I have only heard your tones of annoyance, dear aunt, I am satisfied that I am the culprit under censure."

Mrs. Radcliffe looked up at him swiftly, and was relieved to find that her worst fears were unfounded.

"Let me confess to the most abominable conduct imaginable," continued Edgar, airily; "but do not condemn me until I have answered your charges in categorical order. I have been made a fool of by some one," he added, in tones of annoyance, "and, by Jove! they shall be made to answer to me."

Mrs. Radcliffe was mollified, for she was really very fond of the handsome fellow.

"Now listen to this, aunt," he nephew said. "We were

to have gone to the opera, and I had been looking forward to the pleasure with the keenest delight."

He told this lie unblushingly, for he had voted the whole affair to be a bore. The sweetest music on earth to him were the dulcet tones of Isabel Russell.

"Immediately after dinner, I received a telegram calling me to Bridgley depot, and stating that a dear friend of mine was dying there."

"Dear! dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe.

"Both you and Minnie had retired to your rooms, and I rushed away, quite forgetting, in my impetuous haste, to make any calculations regarding the length of time I should be absent. I went to Bridgley, to find that nothing was known there of the telegram, and in the end have had to walk all the way back to Covington, as there was no conveyance to be obtained. I stepped into a swamp, and have had to change my clothes, and I frightened the footman away by tapping at the door, because I did not wish him to see the plight that I was in. You never know what construction servants put upon things. There, now, don't you think that I am deserving of a little pity?"

His eyes fell before his sister's reproachful gaze. She knew that he was hiding a great deal.

"It was a heartless joke," Aunt Radcliffe declared, indignantly. "I am sorry that I have misjudged you, Edgar. I feared—I feared that you might have been acting imprudently."

Alston flushed redly, and the look that flashed into his averted eyes was not pleasant to see.

"One o'clock!" exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe, suddenly.

"We must retire at once. It is a shame to keep the servants up so long for nothing."

She rose, and shook out her skirts, and at the same moment there was a prolonged peal at the door-bell—a peal which startled all three.

Alston turned deadly pale, and grew weak about the knees. This was most unusual for him, as he had always prided himself upon having nerves like steel. Minnie glanced at him questioningly, and Mrs. Radcliffe waited in grim silence.

Then the footman entered the room without knocking, and in the door-way was standing the tall figure of a policeman, in whom Edgar immediately recognized his acquaintance who had called a vehicle for him at the Covington carriage stand.

"It's all right, aunt," Alston said, with rare presence of mind. "I told this man how I had been fooled, and he may have news for me. I will see him alone in another room."

The detective heard these words, a grim smile on his lips.

"Now," he thought, "I am sure of my man! He's a cool one, and no mistake! Calls this lady aunt, eh? Great Scott!"

"John," continued Alston, addressing the footman, lights in the library, please."

The man hurried away, and in one minute Edgar and the detective were alone, measuring each other curiously.

"This is a great surprise for me," the New York exquisite observed, at length. "Of course I recognize you again, but cannot for the life of me conceive why you have followed me here."

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The detective laughed ironically, and Edgar Alston's eyes flashed with anger.

"Now, don't try to bluff me any more," he sneered, "and understand that I've got you covered, even if my right hand is in the breast-pocket of my coat. I suppose the ladies"—jerking one thumb behind him—"are covering your tracks. Women always are as faithful as dogs to such fellows as you!"

Alston stared at the man before him and then burst into laughter.

"By Jove! this is too good," he said. "Who the duse do you take me for? But for the amusing part of it, I'd chuck you out. Come, speak up, man!"

"It's of no use, Gilbert Roseberry," the detective replied, sententiously. "You know me, and I know you."

His eyes never left Alston now, and the right hand that slipped from the breast-pocket of his ulster revealed a gleaming six-shooter.

"I am Nat Hawkley, and I am going to take you back to the Frankfort Penitentiary either dead or alive."

"When did you make this precious discovery?" demanded Edgar. "You can drop that pistol. I give you my word of honor that I shall not attempt to escape."

"No, sir. I shall not drop it," said Hawkley. "Gilbert Roseberry, you are my prisoner!"

He advanced a pace, and Alston retorted:

"Stand back, you fool! You must be mad! Convicts just out of prison do not usually wear hair upon their faces, and very little on their heads. I am not the man you want. An end to this buffoonery, quickly! My aunt and sister will become alarmed."

"That mustache, etc., will easily come off, I guess," was the dry response. "Now, sir, the handcuffs are ready!"

For a moment Alston's frame quivered with suppressed fury; then he said, savagely:

"Beware, Mr. Hawkley, or whatever your name may be. I am Edgar Alston, son of Jabez Alston, the New York millionaire. This house belongs to Mrs. Radcliffe, and the lady is my aunt. I believe that you are honestly mistaken, and as I am responsible for that mistake, I am disposed to help you in your search for the right man."

"Go on," smiled Hawkley.

"I will tell you this much. The clothes in which he escaped from the Frankfort Penitentiary are in my dressing-room up stairs. A decoy telegram was sent to me to-day, and took me to Bridgley. To return home at once, I had to walk to Covington, and came through the tunnel. The last train had gone."

The detective eyed him warily.

"When half-way through, I was held up by some fellow—a pistol at my head—and forced to give up my clothing. I preferred doing that to being shot, but I had no idea that my assailant was anything worse than a desperate tramp. He took my hat, and an ordinary dress suit. The rest you know."

Mr. Hawkley lowered his revolver, a growl of disgust escaping him.

"One moment, Mr. Alston," he said. "Although I am half-convinced, I am not going to be tricked. Put your hands in these irons while I examine you at close quarters."

"Certainly," Edgar laughed, "but remember that you

"GILBERT ROSEBERRY, YOU ARE MY PRISONER!" are wasting valuable time. Gilbert Roseberry, your es-

caped convict, is traveling away from you with a roll of my bills in his pocket."

"I am convinced," Nat said, at last. "And just when I felt cock-sure! Will you oblige by showing me that telegram?"

"I would rather not."

"I think that you had better do so, sir. It will release you from a good deal of suspicion."

"Suspicion?"

"Yes. Don't you see that all this might be construed into a trick to help Roseberry off?"

"But the telegram had nothing to do with the convict. My walking in the tunnel was the merest chance. It was a silly hoax on the part of some of my friends."

"Still, I should like to see it," Nat Hawkley persisted.

"It involves the name of a lady friend," objected Edgar. "But I respect your reasons. The exhibit of that slip of paper proves the truth of my story. You shall see it if you promise to hold your tongue. If the other part of the story gets out, I cannot help it, though my life will be hell on earth for months afterward. Reporters and sensational newspaper men have no respect for even the most sacred privacy of men's lives in their efforts to obtain reading that panders to the depraved appetites of the mob. Under the canting cry of public interest, the innocent and guilty are lashed into frenzy by exposures which demoralize even those who ever crave for more!"

The detective smiled.

"True, sir-too true!" he replied. "And the higher the victims move in the social scale, the better the papers like

it. It is a vice that feeds on its own filth, and some of the most honored in the land only escape by submitting to blackmail. I will respect your feelings, Mr. Alston, and at present I see no necessity for any part of the story to get into the public print. It need go no further. Roseberry has gone, but I have an important clew. It will not serve me to acquaint him with the knowledge I possess concerning his movements up till the moment he left you attired in evening dress. I would like to take possession of the clothes he gave to you."

"Certainly," said Edgar, delighted at the turn affairs were taking, and at the same time handing the telegram to Nat Hawkley.

"Isabel! Humph!" muttered the detective, casting a furtive glance at the young man. "A lady in your own set, sir?"

"No-er-not exactly; but a lady, nevertheless."

"I am surprised that you ventured in the tunnel," the detective went on, after a short silence, "particularly as you are a stranger hereabouts."

"The station-agent suggested it, because I was not familiar with the country. By following the track I could not wander away."

"Very true. I must see the agent, though. Now, sir, I will trouble you for the clothes and your New York address. I may want to call upon you by and by."

Alston ran up stairs, returning in a few minutes with the convict suit made into a parcel. He was delighted to get rid of it. Then he scribbled down the address of his club in New York, and after drinking a stiff glass of whisky, Mr. Nathaniel Hawkley went away. "I shall run down the man who has had the temerity to fool with me!" Edgar told his aunt and sister a few minutes later; but the next morning he was forced to explain several matters to Minnie, which were decidedly unpalatable to him.

"It is unkind for you to suggest that Mr. Hawley played so foolish a joke," Minnie said.

"Oh, I know that he is your paragon! In him are all the virtues exemplified!" Edgar laughed. "At least in my lady's eyes!"

"You shall not speak in this way!" his sister replied, with kindling cheeks. "Mr. Hawley is your friend——"

"And your fervent admirer, dear girl! There! I will brave your wrath, and admit it, but it would never do for papa even to suspect it. By Jove! how pretty you look when you blush, Minnie! Poor old Ed! He is one of the best fellows in the world, but has hardly had a dollar to his name since his father failed. That is one strong reason that he never comes to our place now. He could not bear to hear our respected papa's hopes for both of our futures! You know how he runs that subject to death? Worse than a matrimonial agent! If he only knew!"

There was silence for a few minutes. Edgar had spoken truly when he hinted that his sister and his old college chum, Edward Hawley, were in love with each other. For years they had been occasionally thrown together, and a deep, unspoken affection had sprung up between them. Hawley had been deterred from saying one word by Mr. Alston's often expressed desire that his only daughter would marry a title, and when financial ruin crushed his father's honored name, his visits to the Alston mansion ceased.

"I am afraid that papa will have more than one disappointment," Minnie said, decidedly.

"I am afraid so!"

"Edgar, why will you not tell me more of the girl who seems to have absorbed your whole soul?"

"You shall know all soon," he told her, a dark flush in his cheek.

"Tell me, Edgar, does—does—Mr. Hawley approve——"

"I ask no man's or woman's approval," he replied, angrily. "I have told you that Ed knows my Isabel—I have told you this to satisfy you, Minnie, but I have not asked him to approve of my choice. He himself introduced me to the woman, without whom life would be but dust and ashes to me now!"

His sister was surprised by the passion he displayed, and thought to herself:

"Whoever this Isabel may be, I fear that her influence upon poor Edgar is the reverse of good. I will contrive to see Edward Hawley when we get back to New York."

The mere whisper of his name brought a beautiful blush to her cheeks!

CHAPTER IV.

"LOVE THAT HATH US IN THE NET!"

Two mornings later Edgar and his sister were seated at the breakfast-table at home. Mr. Alston, senior, was reading the financial column of the morning paper and indulging in an occasional grunt when something therein merited his disapproval.

"Argentines have fallen to seventy," he muttered. "The market is stagnant. Now, if I handle these rightly——"

He closed his eyes, and was absorbed in mental calculation, until his daughter reminded him that his coffee would be cold, and while Edgar gnawed his mustache in a state of abstraction.

"Ah, thank you, my child," said Mr. Jabez Alston, the deep lines about his mouth and eyes relaxing into a smile. "You cannot guess how lonely I have felt the last few days. Robbed of your bright presence, every room has seemed dark and dull."

It was difficult to imagine any of the splendid rooms of the Alston mansion in Fifth avenue, dull. The furniture and pictures in each apartment represented a fortune. Mr. Jabez Alston was a connoisseur in his way. With all his love for money, he had an appreciative eye for the beautiful and the quaint. His pictures, his statuary, and his collection of old armor were valued at a million.

"But," he went on, with a meaning smile, "I must use

myself to loneliness. I cannot expect to have you ever near to me. After our trip to Europe, no one knows what may happen. By the way, Lord St. Leonards was here yesterday. He insists that we are to be his guests while in London. My children, you will be thrown into the very cream of the fashionable British upper ten! Oh, how they are fascinated by the American dollar!"

Edgar frowned and yawned.

"Do you require my attendance at the office to-day, father?" he asked.

"I think that I might easily dispense with your services altogether, Edgar," was the good-humored reply. "Still, it gives tone to the establishment for my son to be there when the head is away. I shall stick close to business for the next two weeks. The markets want constant watching. There are ominous signs of a severe crisis, which will make and unmake vast fortunes. If you see anything of St. Leonards, bring him home to dine."

"I will give his lordship your invitation, father, but I have an engagement to dine at the club to-day."

Mentally he added:

"I will evade the British peer as I would a mad dog!"

"It is always your club," Mr. Alston muttered, testily. "Edgar, I do not think you study my wishes in the least, and it is quite time that you settled down into some semblance of respectability. The club means a midnight orgie of some kind, which is almost as disreputable to me as it is to yourself."

He rose hurriedly from the table, and having pressed a hasty kiss on his daughter's brow, left the room. Five

minutes later he was driven away in a coupe to his business in Wall street.

"I am sick of it all!" Edgar said to his sister, when they were alone in the drawing-room. "This Lord St. Leonards is booked by our papa for you, Minnie, and I am expected to reserve myself for the peer's sister, or cousin, or any other angular fright that may be possessed of a title and a pedigree. I have not a particle of interest in this projected trip to Europe, and have no intention of going, either! The midnight orgie to which he so politely referred means a visit to the woman I worship! I tell you what it is—we shall have to face the old chap, assert ourselves, and trust to luck!"

There was a moody frown on his brow.

"And as for the beggarly allowance he makes me," he went on, savagely, "it is a disgrace, considering his wealth!"

Minnie opened her eyes widely.

"Ten thousand a year, Edgar," she reminded him.

"Pshaw!"

He was thinking of the siren who had enslaved him.

"For your sake, Minnie, I will take care not to run across St. Leonards," he went on, sympathetically. "You are far too good for that effete member of the British aristocracy, with his maddening drawl. Now for the solution of that telegram—a call upon Hawley, and then—"

His brow became unclouded, and a joyous light shone in his eyes.

"And then?" questioned Minnie. "I think I can guess the rest."

There was a smile upon her lips, but it slowly died away as she whispered:

"And you will take me to Isabel soon, will you not? Oh, Edgar, you do not know how anxious I am to see the woman who has the making of my only brother—for good or evil. And is it not right that I should know her—should know one who may one day be my sister?"

"What stuff you talk!" Edgar said, pettishly. "Though the last drop of my heart's blood belongs to Isabel, I know not whether she returns my affection yet! Do you know, Minnie," he went on, huskily, "if I lost her I should lose my reason? I should go mad! You spoke truly when you said that she had the making of me, for good or evil. Tell me if you can understand such love as this?"

"No," shuddered his sister; "I cannot! It is not love, it is frenzy. Under such influences as these, men are ready to commit almost any crime!"

"I believe you," he replied, moodily. "If Isabel told me to commit murder, I believe that I should do it!"

Then he laughed in a constrained manner, adding:

"What nonsense we are talking! And how serious you have grown!"

His sister did not reply, but when he was gone she penned the following note to Edward Hawley:

"DEAR MR. HAWLEY:—I wish to consult with you upon a very important matter concerning Edgar. He often declares that you are the only real friend he has in the world, and I know not to whom else I can turn in my present difficulty. Please treat this with confidence. I shall be at home any afternoon this week, between two and four o'clock.

"Sincerely yours,

"MINNIE ALSTON."

She wrote this with many misgivings. Was there anything wrong in doing so? Was there anything that was not strictly within the bounds of decorum?

The letter was sent by a servant to Mr. Hawley's apartments in Twenty-third street. A year previously he had occupied, with his parents, a house as handsome as that of Mr. Jabez Alston, but Mr. Hawley, senior, had lost every cent of which he was possessed in some gigantic enterprise which had ingulfed the fortunes and the honor of many other men who had been reputed as wealthy as Crœsus—he lost every cent, and the shock killed him. The erstwhile gilded broker, whose plunges had made even a monarchy tremble, died with scarcely enough left to pay his funeral expenses. His house, his furniture, his horses—everything was sold to satisfy the greedy maw of the creditor.

The man who had received their fawning caresses, they now cursed for a knave, because the cards had at last run the wrong way. His son and widow moved into a cheap flat in Twenty-third street, and Edward Hawley, who had never earned a meal, found himself face to face with life in its sternest aspect. Twenty dollars, an ornamental education, and a name which had become a by-word, was his stock in trade.

An old friend offered him the post of book-keeper in a large dry-goods store, but he felt that it would be an imposition to make a pretense of doing that of which he had but a very superficial knowledge. He respectfully declined the offer, and was cut to the quick to see that his decision was received with relief—nay, almost gratitude!

"I am an object of pitiable charity," he thought, bit-

terly. "I will see no more of these who knew me in my prosperity. The past is dead!"

His principal amusement had been painting, but he was not sufficiently expert as an artist to gain a livelihood by painting pictures for the dealers, or even clever enough to obtain commissions from the book publishers. He lacked the necessary experience, and with poverty at his elbows he could not wait.

In this unhappy frame of mind he was passing the Hoffman House one morning, his eyes bent to the pavement, when some one called, loudly:

"Hullo! Is that you, Hawley?"

He recognized the voice. It was that of one of his oldest friends—it was the brother of the girl to whom he had given the one love of his life—now, alas! utterly hopeless—it was Edgar Alston—unsteady on his feet, weary of eye, and tremulous with the misery that nights of dissipation leave behind.

Hawley turned, and the two young men shook hands.

"Where the duse have you been lately?" demanded Alston. "By Jove! old boy, I must have a whisky cocktail. Come along!"

"No-no! Not in there now!"

"Why? Ah! I understand," Edgar returned, with ready sympathy, and they turned into the nearest saloon.

"Of course I know all about the old boy," Edgar went on. "Who does not? But you are not actually cleaned out of the boodle, eh?"

"Every dollar!" groaned Hawley. "But then—don't pity me. I've had quite enough of that. Not that I should mind you, old man; not that I do mind you. You have a

good heart somewhere, though it is devilish weak in some things. Why will you drink so much of this stuff? You are killing yourself!"

"We never did agree on that point, Hawley," Alston said, sulkily, "but a fellow must enjoy himself, you know. I shall have to settle down some day. Do you know that I sometimes wish I were one of those poor devils who drive a pen ten hours a day for a weekly stipend of as many dollars? My life out West has done me no good. I contracted all my bad habits out there. The old boy sent me away on account of that little girl who was cashier in Milligan's buffet. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember. She married one of the waiters a month afterward," smiled Hawley.

An oath escaped Alston's lips; then he went on with some improbable stories of his adventures out West, which Edward had heard at least a hundred times before with variations.

"I may be a bad lot—an out and out loafer," concluded Edgar, "but I have not had the guidance of a mother, and my father looks upon me merely as a stepping-stone to some future social triumph. I have had no anchor chain about me to restrain all that is reckless and foolish in my nature."

"How can you seriously say that?" his companion asked, a little reproachfully. "No man ever had a better sister than you have."

Alston glanced at him sharply, saying:

"Poor Minnie! Yes, I know that she loves me; but a sister is not everything, and she is very much in the same boat with me. Why do you not come to our place now, Ed?" he added, gently.

"You can guess."

"I am not quite blind, and Minnie misses you very much."

"I should be a dishonorable villain to come now. I am as poor as the proverbial mouse."

"That would not affect my sister."

"But your father!"

There was an imperceptible sneer on Hawley's face and in his tones.

"Yes—yes! My father is a monomaniac upon one subject. But, look here, old man; we must hope for the best. You will make your way, and may win Minnie in spite of all! For myself, I am fancy-free, and hate all women since——"

"Since the girl at the buffet—"

"Oh, don't!" groaned Alston. "I shall never love another! And she married a waiter—a little beast of an Italian, with splay feet and a squint! But n'importe!"

He gulped down his whisky almost savagely, while his companion was unconsciously smiling, a pre-occupied look in his hazel eyes. He was thinking of Miss Alston.

Presently he held out his hand, saying, sadly:

"I must say good-by, old fellow."

"No, I'm blessed if you do!" was the energetic retort. "You are going home with me!"

He looked with fond affection at his friend, but Hawley shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, old man. I have nothing to do with the past; I am not the Edward Hawley of the glorious Harvard days. I

am not the Edward Hawley who was nursed in the lap of New York's select! I am obliterated, and the business of life is before me."

He groaned. The business of life!

A unit in the mad throng, who had no answer to the savage questioning glances as to his right among them!
What was his business? He had none!

"What are you doing?" demanded Edgar Alston, suspiciously. "I have a right to know—the right of a life-long friendship."

"Nothing-yet!"

"And what do you intend doing?"

'I don't know,'' was the broken rejoinder. "Don't torture me, Edgar."

Alston was silent. He realized his friend's position far more acutely than if a volume of words had been exchanged.

"My father—" he began, but Hawley interrupted him.

"I will have no man's pity or patronage. You understand me? Why should I occupy a post, and be paid to be a stumbling-block and a nuisance because I am pitied? I will not have it! I must feel that I am doing honest work—that I am giving a fair equivalent for whatever I receive. I have a slight thread of hope. I have this morning called upon a sign-painter—a man who makes a specialty of pictorial advertisements in oils, and he has promised to give me a trial. I am fairly clever with the brush, as far as mediocrity goes."

"Good Heaven!" ejaculated Alston. "Has it come to this?"

"Yes, it has come to this. I have to support my mother."

"How much do you expect to get for those signs?"

"Haven't the faintest idea!"

"Look here, Ed. I'm not going to desert you now," Alston burst out. "Come with me—I insist!"

He thrust one arm through that of his friend, adding:

"I am going to the Frivolity Theater. They want a good man for scenic work. Stimson, the manager, is a friend of mine. The employment will be regular, as they go in for variety business, and there is money in it."

Hawley became as pale as death.

The suddenly aroused hope was almost too much for him, and he was led away unresistingly by Alston.

He remembered being introduced to Stimson, a portly, middle-aged man, with an expansive shirt front, in the center of which was a diamond as large as a walnut, whose brilliancy appeared to be for the purpose of illuminating a watch-chain as thick as a man's finger. He heard as in a dream the conversation concerning Mr. Stimson's requirements, and was told that he might begin work right away at a salary of sixty dollars a week! After three months of absolute beggary, this was a fortune! And yet, only a short time back he had frequently spent a hundred dollars upon one evening's enjoyment!

So pleased was the management with his work—his steady application, his quiet, unassuming manners, that an agreement was drafted wherein he was bound to work for the Frivolity exclusively at a salary of one hundred dollars per week.

The flat in Twenty-third street was soon comfortably furnished, and a neat servant-maid added to the little household. Once more, Edward Hawley held up his head.

His widowed mother enjoyed many of her little luxuries, including even her drives in Central Park, and her son had been induced to dine with the Alstons more than once.

But he was always unhappy and discontented after seeing Minnie Alston, and at last he resolved never to go to the Fifth avenue mansion again. What was he? A mere scenic artist, and she? The daughter of New York's proudest millionaire!

All this happened some months prior to the opening scene in this chapter, and Edward Hawley had vainly tried to tear the image of Minnie Alston from his heart. She could never be anything to him, and it was with the bitterest pangs of sorrow and jealousy that he heard of the frequent visits to the Alstons of a good-looking British peer, known as Lord St. Leonards. He remembered Mr. Jabez Alston's vanity, his ambition, his scoffings at love and all such insane nonsense. He was a man of inflexible will, of cold and cruel determination, which none ever ventured to oppose, unless they were brave enough to merit his eternal displeasure and enmity. A magnate with millions behind him is a dangerous foe!

CHAPTER V.

THE TEMPTRESS AT WORK.

When Edward Hawley received Miss Alston's note he was almost bewildered with joy! The words were cold and formal, the "Sincerely Yours" and the signature were the same that she had doubtless penned to hundreds of people, but he kissed them rapturously, and vowed that he would never part with the letter, to the day of his death!

"She wishes to consult with me," he murmured, and his heart sank. "Bah! What a fool I am! A mere friendly adviser! Perhaps St. Leonards is to be her future lord, and I am sent for, as an old friend of the family, to advise and assist in the arrangements for the wedding. Heavens! I would sooner be shot!"

Then he laughed at his own foolish fears. No engagement even had yet been announced, and, growing cooler, he rightly surmised that Miss Alston had something to say about her brother.

"He is not worthy of such an angelic sister," Hawley thought. "Still, I believe that he has improved lately, though I see very little of Edgar now that I am out of his set. I did not know that they had returned from Cincinnati."

He lunched with his mother, and after a refreshing smoke, dressed with great care.

"I am going to take half a day off," he told her, "and

shall be home early. We will see Irving in 'Hamlet' tonight, if you like, mother."

Mrs. Hawley gladly assented. How proud she was of her handsome son!

He walked to the Frivolity, and explained to Mr. Stimson that he had an engagement with a friend. His precise business ways and punctuality had gained for him the respect and confidence of the whole management.

While the church clocks were chiming the hour of three, he strode quickly along the smooth pavements of Fifth avenue, and passed under the splendid portico of the Alston mansion, his heart beating quick time.

The footman admitted him at once, and he was conducted into one of the magnificent reception-rooms, wherein Jabez Alston delighted to entertain and do honor to the foremost notabilities of the time.

In a very few minutes there was a soft footfall without, and Edward Hawley felt the hot blood rush through every artery of his being. The door opened, and Minnie Alston stood before him, her dark eyes aglow, her whole soul shining in her lovely orbs.

Hawley rose to meet her, and they exchanged a few commonplaces; then they were seated, and for a minute there was an awkward silence.

"I have obeyed your note, Miss Alston," Hawley at last ventured.

"Your are very kind," stammered Minnie. "I half repented of my action when it was too late. I forgot how much you are engaged, but trouble makes us selfish and inconsiderate."

"Trouble?" he questioned, gently.

"Yes; it is about Edgar."

"Ha! I feared something of this kind, but I hoped that he was improving."

"In one way, yes; but for some weeks he has been infatuated with some lady, and the madness of his passion frightens me. I am afraid that he will do something dreadful. You have not seen him to-day?" she questioned, suddenly.

"No," was the grave reply.

"Then you know nothing of his recent escapades, and I know that he intends calling upon you to-day or to-morrow. I would not have troubled you in the matter, only I am anxious to know if the lady who has completely enslaved Edgar, body and soul, is a good woman. He will tell me nothing about her, and I have an intuitive feeling that all is not right."

Hawley looked at her in surprise.

"Miss Alston, I knew nothing of this," he answered.
"Edgar has not made a confidant of me; and if he had, I
do not think that it would be honorable for me to interfere
in so delicate a matter."

Minnie flushed warmly, saying:

"I think that your notions of honor are a little strained, Mr. Hawley. Pray do not forget that I am Edgar Alston's only sister, and that his well-being is dearer to me than my own. He informed me that you had introduced the lady to him, and with that guarantee upon the hall-mark of her respectability, I have for some time been content. I do not know why I should doubt the lady, only that he is so reticent concerning her, and that which he calls love is perhaps but an evil spell that drowns his senses."

Hawley was watching her with passionate eyes, but he dropped them suddenly, and murmured:

"I introduced him to this lady? What is her name, Miss Alston?"

"Even that he will not tell me, but I have heard him speak of her as Isabel."

Edward Hawley's face grew dark.

"That she-devil!" he muttered; then jumping to his feet, he paced the floor in violent agitation.

"Miss Alston, you have shocked me beyond measure," he said. "Unfortunately, I did introduce him to a dancing woman named Isabel Russell. Edgar called at the Frivolity to see me, and she was there at the time upon business with the manager, who told me a part of her checkered career. She is a wonderfully beautiful woman, and Edgar insisted upon an introduction. You know how susceptible he is. But the circumstance had quite escaped my memory, and I understood that her terms did not suit the management of the Frivolity. That is all I know of the matter."

Minnie clasped her hands in anguish.

"I feared something of this kind," she said. "His father will cast him off forever, and then he will go to the bad irretrievably."

"And in a measure it will be Mr. Alston's own fault," Hawley remarked, bitterly and sternly. "He would sell his children to gratify an ambition which is contemptible in any man who breathes the true principles of American freedom."

He gazed at her, an honest flush on his cheek, the fire of righteous indignation in his hazel eyes, and then he turned away with a sound that was half a sob. "Mr. Hawley!"

He swung round, and he saw in her blushing, beautiful face that which was more eloquent than written volumes.

"Minnie!" he whispered, hoarsely. "God forgive me for this madness of a moment. I cannot resist you! I have loved you as my divinity for long years. I have dreamed of you by night and by day, but the change in my fortunes, independently of your father's maudlin hopes, renders it an insult for me to speak to the daughter of the greatest capitalist and financier of modern times. I have worshiped you in the happy years that may never be recalled. I worship you now; I shall worship you forever! Now you may send me away, never to look upon or speak to you again!"

He dropped the burning fingers that he had seized in his sudden passion. He turned and reeled half across the floor, and would have fled if Miss Alston had not held out her hands to him imploringly.

"Mr. Hawley—Edward!" she said, with flaming cheeks.
"This avowal has not altogether surprised me. My heart has told me that you care for me even as I do for you!"

She bowed her head. His arms were about her instantly, his hot kisses on her face. His brain swam. Oh! this ecstatic reality!

What words of fond endearment passed between them—what vows of eternal constancy, only the angels heard!

It was five o'clock when Edward Hawley left, and he had not been gone twenty minutes when Jabez Alston arrived home, accompanied by a tall, thin exquisite whom he addressed as "my lord." This was St. Leonards, the

British aristocrat, who wore upon his face a perpetual barren smile, and in his right eye a monocle.

While these eventful happenings were taking place, Edgar Alston had called at the Athenian Club, and had received from the steward several letters, but the one which enchained his attention read as follows, and it was written in a bold, firm hand:

"EDGAR ALTSON, Esq.

"My Dear Sir:—I take an early opportunity for thanking you for the loan you so kindly advanced me the other evening, and you will find the exact amount returned herein. The clothes I borrowed from you are also left with the steward, as I never permit myself to be long in any man's debt. Those you took in exchange I have no further use for. By the way, I am very glad that you did not show fight in the tunnel, for I was not only unarmed, but very weak from long fasting. However, all's well that ends well.

Gratefully Yours,

"GILBERT ROSEBERRY."

Alston read this precious missive over twice, then he burst into amused laughter. The money was there all right, and the clothes he presented to one of the club employees.

"Who left this letter?" he asked the steward. "I see that it was brought by hand."

"A boy. He said that it had been given to him by a gentleman outside."

After lunch he sent for a cab and was driven to a jeweler's in Broadway.

His business there was brief, but it left him indebted to the firm to the tune of two thousand dollars, for a glittering bauble which he carried in his vest-pocket. The credit of the only son of Jabez Alston was almost unlimited! "Fifty-second street and Park avenue!" he said to the Jehu, springing into the cab.

There was a wild glitter in his eyes, a flush on his face, and his breath came in short, quick gasps. The joy even of anticipation was almost more than he could bear.

At the corner of Fifty-second street and Park avenue he dismissed his cabman, and proceeded on foot until he stood before a pretentious brown-stone apartment house. With a latch-key he gained entrance to the hall, and sprang up the stairs two steps at a time. On the third floor he paused to press an electric button in the wall.

One of the doors was promptly opened by a clean-looking servant-woman, who gave a mute assent to Alston's question, "Is Miss Russell within?" by moving aside for him to pass.

Beyond was a medium-sized reception-room worthy of a poet's dream. The carpet was velvet of the most beautiful texture, make, and design. The windows were draped with billowy folds of snowy lace, which lent relief to the paleblue curtains of finest silk, looped back with tiny tassels of gold. There were but a few pictures—gems in their way. The furniture was the choicest that money could buy; and everywhere were scattered about costly ornaments and bric-a-brac which would have sent a collector frantic with envy. The vases were filled with flowers, freshly cut, and on every hand was the evidence of wealth and refinement.

Reclining on a lounge in this gilded cage—this bower of a beauty—was one of the loveliest women ever created to enslave the heart of man. Though five-and-twenty years of age, there was not a voluptuous line in her perfect

figure. She was graceful and rhythmical from the soles of her dainty feet—from the pink tips of her taper fingers to the crown of her shapely head! The face was oval, and faultless in its contour. The nose was straight, the eyes large and black as midnight—deep, misty, hidden wells of fervent passion; the mouth was full and red as blood. The hair of bluest-black surmounted her head like a royal crown. There was a carnation at her waxen throat, and her dress was of pale-amber silk, while her fingers sparkled with gems.

This living Venus was Isabel Russell—the peri who had cast the spell of her witchery over Edgar Alston.

And this was the splendid cage he had provided for her—insane with the madness of his love!

He stepped softly into the room, carefully closing the door behind him, and Isabel sprang up with a low cry.

"Edgar! Oh, you darling, to come so soon!"

He pressed her to his heart, delirious with joy. Her clinging lips sent his blood like molten fire bounding through every artery.

"Queenie," he whispered, "you received my letter?"

"Yes, Edgar; but why will you cling to the old name? Do you know how I hate it—the pet name which has been fouled by the lips of so many love-sick fools!"

"You are my queen!" panted Alston, as he seated himself beside her. "My queen forever! But in future I will call you Isabel—always Isabel."

She flashed upon him the lightnings of her ever-changing eyes, and whispered:

"I received your letter, and I was frightened. The mystery of that telegram—who has guessed that we are any-

thing to each other? And your strange adventure made me tremble. A convict!"

She held up her hands in pretended horror.

"Oh, Edgar, if he had killed you!"

"He is no ordinary criminal, Isabel," Alston replied.

"See! here is a letter from him which has been left at my club. By Jove! he must have nerves of steel! I would almost consider it an honor to shake hands with the rascal! But he is playing a fool-hardy game, and is bound to be caught."

The lovely siren read the letter with evident interest, a delicate pink flush dyeing her rounded cheeks.

Then she pushed it away with a little shudder, murmuring:

"Oh, how dreadful! I am so glad that the—the convict seems so kindly disposed toward you. Will you let me keep this letter, dear? I am fond of such curious things."

"It is yours, darling, and here is something of far greater value."

He took from his pocket a small leather case, and in its satin-lined interior displayed a tiny tiara of diamonds—brilliant-hued and beautiful.

"Oh, Edgar!" she gasped. "How lovely! You must have spent a fortune to obtain these perfect gems!"

"Two thousand dollars," he replied, complacently. "A sum well spent, even for one sweet kiss!"

She sprang away, pretending to evade an expected caress, her low laughter sounding like the tinkle of summer waters, and he gazed in rapture at her glorious form.

Before a mirror she paused to fix the bauble in her hair, then sank beside him again, her sinuous movements, her bewitching smiles sending him into the seventh heaven of delight.

"Have you yet had sufficient evidence of my love for you, Isabel?" he asked, softly. "Can you give me some definite promise, my darling, that you will be my wife?"

"How impatient you are!" was the low reply, while she caressed his hair with her cool fingers. "Your love may be but a passing dream——"

"No-no!" he interrupted.

"And I want to be assured that it is deathless—that it is no fever fancy," she proceeded. "Oh, you men are so fickle, and it would kill me to be an unloved wife!"

"Unloved!" he gasped. "Impossible, Isabel!"

"But I have been told so before, many times. Lovers come, and lovers go!"

"And have you given any other man the right to kiss you?" he demanded, jealously—"to caress you as I have done?"

"No, no, Edgar! Do not look at me like that! There was murder in your eyes!"

She shivered, and spoke piteously.

"Murder!" he laughed, harshly. "Isabel, I believe that I could be guilty of any crime for love of you! If you commanded me to do it, I should have no power to resist."

She turned her head to hide a smile of contempt, and continued:

"Do not let us talk of these awful things. You frighten me! Let it be sufficient for the present, Edgar, that you are all the world to me. I am not so selfish that I would alienate you from the affections of your father. Have you not dragged me from the profession I hated? Have you not surrounded me with every luxury?"

She pressed her lips to his fevered brow, and he caught her in a mad embrace.

"It must be settled soon—one way or the other," he said. "This suspense will kill me. I care not for father's wishes—I care for nothing——"

"Hush, darling! You must not be rash. I could never marry a poor man! Oh! I hate poverty—I hate it because I know that love and poverty never agree!"

She clasped her hands together pathetically, and Alston stepped to the window to hide the passionate feelings that were raging in his mind. He cursed the father that stood between him and the possession of this peerless siren.

"Isabel," he said, presently, "you may be right, but I hardly know how I can keep the burning fires within me under control. I must think—I must think! My father is worth thirty millions. At least half of that will be mine."

Her eyes blazed, while her soft bosom heaved tumultuously.

"Thirty millions!" she whispered, huskily. "A part of it is yours by right! It would be no sin to take your share!"

She shot a hungry glance at him; then cried, rapturously:

"Oh, Edgar, there will be a lovely moon to-night, the sky is clear, and the air fresh and crisp! You must take me for a drive. Remember how very good I have been while you have been away! Promise, darling."

"I would promise anything!" he replied.

"Then be here at six o'clock! Now run away, there's a

dear boy, as I am expecting my Aunt Judith from Colorado this afternoon."

She had but to command to be obeyed, and after another embrace he turned to go, saying:

"I will be here at six, Isabel! One question, my darling. You will not inflict Aunt Judith upon me, will you? It would make our drive valueless!"

"How ridiculous!" rippled from Isabel Russell's rosy mouth, and the siren laughter followed him like the chiming of fairy bells.

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CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MESHES OF THE SIREN.

For a minute the beautiful witch stood, her lips wreathed in bitterest contempt, her eyes glowing with triumph. Then her whole expression changed to one of burning anxiety; the face was transformed from that of a smiling she-devil into that of a loving woman!

A door at the end of the room, half-hidden by a screen, was thrown open, revealing an anteroom beyond, from which emerged the figure of the woman whom Alston had been thought to believe was the servant-maid of his enchantress.

"Have you got rid of that poor half-witted thing, Isabel?" she asked.

"Lucy, do not keep me in suspense. Gilbert has come! I heard his step on the stair. I know it in a thousand, and I sent Mr. Alston away."

Her heart was throbbing wildly now, and to have brought that look into her glorious eyes Edgar Alston would have forfeited his immortal soul!

"Gilbert! Oh, my husband!"

A man had appeared in the doorway, a tall man, with snow-white hair and mustache; the face was lined with age, or the perfection of art, but behind the spectacles he wore were eyes of unusual brilliancy.

"Isabel," he laughed, "are you glad to see me?"

With a well-pleased look upon her face, Lucy retired, while husband and wife fell into each other's arms.

"There," he said, "I must rest, Isabel; my health has not been improved by the atmosphere of Frankfort, and the subsequent adventures which befell me. By Jove! how beautiful you are, my dear! And what a fairy nest is this!"

He looked about him enviously.

"I was never able to provide for you in this way, Isabel."

"You gave me your love, Gilbert, and a faithful heart," she replied. "Others shall provide the wealth we love now."

Her lips curled, and soft laughter rippled through the room.

"I think that our poverty is nearly at an end. I have my plans well made, and nothing shall stand between me and a fortune!"

Her great eyes flashed.

"This last one seems to be well gilded," the man remarked. "What became of Hilton?"

She looked at him sharply.

"Don't forget that I have been away recruiting my health for six months, Isabel," he reminded her.

"Hilton is dead—shot himself!" she shuddered.

"How was that?"

"Embezzlement, and its usual attendants," was the calm reply. "No more small game, Gilbert! Now tell me your chances of being safe. I knew that you were in New York. I have seen your letter to young Alston, the millionaire's son."

He smiled grimly, saying:

"My God, Isabel, your equal was never born before! But I do not wonder that men worship you. You grow handsomer every day. I shall be glad when there is an end to all this—when we can settle down in peace and safety. A taste of convict life subdues the fire in a man, and I have the nauseous flavor still in my mouth! This comes of a wasted youth; and though my love for you has been my undoing, I would willingly go through all my sufferings again rather than lose you!"

"I believe you, Gilbert, and now I am working for you."

"I am pretty certain that I have thrown the blood-hounds off the scent, and there is small danger in my coming here, for none will connect Gilbert Roseberry with Isabel Russell, the danseuse."

"That is all over," she said.

"And my disguise is perfect," he continued. "Even Lucy failed to recognize me! No, there must be no more small game. The horse trick worked pretty well while it lasted, but it was too risky all along, and landed me in Frankfort Prison for two years—less eighteen months," he added, with a cheerful smile. "Your plans for my escape, Isabel, worked like a charm, until the very last. In some way Hawkley got scent of me, and I dared not way-lay young Alston, as arranged. You are sure that you can trust him?"

"Do I ever make a mistake where love is concerned?" she asked him, scornfully. "Alston would save you at the peril of his neck, if I commanded him to do so. Still, it is perhaps better as it is."

"I half-distrusted him," went on Roseberry. "Two

nights in that infernal tunnel weakened me, but luck ran my way, and when I heard the station-agent advise him to walk back to Covington through the tunnel I knew that I was safe. I had been tracking him for an hour. Now as to the future?"

"I shall want you to obey me, Gilbert, and within three months we will be in Europe with a million at least."

He was startled, and the color showed through the dye on his face.

"Is it a safe lay?" he asked.

"New York will soon be too warm for us—it is too warm now; and I propose to spend a life of luxury elsewhere. I have this Alston in leading strings—I intend having the father—the entire family. Palmer is working with us."

"Curse him!" scowled Roseberry.

"He is indispensable to the perfect success of my schemes," smiled Isabel. "You have no need for further jealousy, Gilbert. Palmer's fever is at an end, and to him, equally with myself, you owe your present liberty."

"Go on," he said, gloomily; "but I am sorry that my old foe still has the whip-hand over me. I fondly hoped that this secret was between us two—and my sister Lucy."

"I tell you that Palmer is utterly and completely in my power. You shall never suffer through him. I would kill him first!" she hissed.

In a few words she unfolded to him the substance of a diabolical plot, and he listened with glistening eyes.

"Isabel," he said, at last, "if I did not worship you, I should believe that you were a beautiful devil. My only

wonder is that you are content with me, when you can bring the world to your feet!"

"We have little to fear," she proceeded, "except Stimson, the manager of the Frivolity. He refused me employment when to dance was my last resource. I met him in Chicago, and never dreamed of seeing him in New York, but he must not stand in my way."

She pressed her red lips together until they looked like streaks of blood.

"And my part in all this?" questioned Roseberry.

"To keep yourself free of the police by playing chaperon. You are to be my Aunt Judith, and the necessary disguise is ready," laughed Isabel. "Mr. Alston is coming at six to take me for a drive. When we return you must meet him at supper."

In the meanwhile, Alston had sauntered back to his club, his mind full of one horrible thought.

His father was standing between him and happiness!

"She is mine—she is mine!" he thought, "if I can but assure her that we shall not be poor! Can it be wondered at that she has this horrible dread of poverty, after the cruel way in which the world has buffeted her about?"

His goddess had confided to him the story of her life.

"She, a lady by birth, driven forth to work and herd with the mob. The stage was her only avenue from starvation—a profession she abhors. Poor Isabel! I would die for you! And now, how shall I face my father? Why should he hoard his millions, while a tenth part of his wealth would place me in a garden of paradise?"

At the club doors he was accosted by a tall man attired in a neat-fitting suit of dark-gray.

"I wish to see you, Mr. Alston," he said.

Edgar scanned him from head to toe.

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir."

"Nathaniel Hawkley," was the dry response.

"Ah! I should not have recognized you, Mr. Hawkley," Edgar said. "If your business is not very pressing, Mr. Hawkley, I should be glad to defer it. I have an important engagement."

"I will not detain you five minutes, sir," the detective replied, unabashed by the hauteur in Alston's tones. "I understand that a parcel was left here to-day, and I suspect that it contained the clothes you permitted the convict Roseberry to take from you."

"Who told you this?" demanded Edgar.

"Never mind who told me, sir; that is my business. I only ask you for a confirmation or a denial."

"Yes, the man has returned the clothes. What more do you require?" Alston spoke impatiently. "You people always make so much mystery out of nothing."

"Did Roseberry send you anything else?" demanded Hawkley.

"A letter," said Alston, laughing, half amused and half annoyed. "I see that it is useless evading the questions. There are sneaks and spies about the building. I shall complain to the landlord."

"Will you permit me to see that letter, Mr. Alston?" was the respectful query.

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"I have handed it to another person."

"To whom, may I ask?"

"I decline to tell you," was the angry reply. "Your manner is inquisitorial. I object to it."

"I have kept this affair out of the papers, Mr. Alston, for your sake. In return, I expect something at your hands. Have you given the letter to the lady whom you know as Isabel?"

"Curse your insolence, sir! I refuse to be cross-questioned by you! Put the story in the papers if you choose, and go to the devil!"

Alston dashed into the club in a towering rage, while the detective looked after him, a strange smile on his face.

"I am not to be bluffed," he said, his eyes kindling, "and I shall keep that young fool in my eye. I have yet to be satisfied that he is not in the swim."

He walked thoughtfully away, while Edgar was giving orders that a smart turn-out and a pair of spirited ponies be ready for his use at five-thirty, sharp.

"Cursed annoying to be badgered by that thick-headed, self-important fool of a detective," he growled, as he savagely bit off the end of a fresh cigar.

He strolled into the smoking-room, feeling that he had acted foolishly.

"The brute may suspect my goddess of being implicated in this affair next," he muttered, "and give her endless annoyance, besides exposing me. I was a fool not to place a sop in his way; and yet, when this sort of thing is once begun, this class of people expect it to go on forever. They become insolent pensioners for life!"

He dropped on a lounge, at the same time glancing impatiently at his watch.

"A quarter-past five! In an hour I shall be whirling along with my darling beside me!"

He felt a hand upon his shoulder, and turned in no gracious mood to see Edward Hawley behind him.

"Hullo, Ed!" he exclaimed. "I intended looking you up to-night. Only got back from Cincinnati yesterday evening." There was something in the grave eyes of his friend that made him feel uneasy. "Sit down and have a cigar. I can spare you five minutes—not more—a pressing engagement, you know."

Hawley sat down, and accepted the proffered cigar.

At that moment there was the sharp clatter of horses' hoofs on the street pavement, and Alston began to fidget uneasily.

"You will excuse me, I know, old man," he said.

"Are those your ponies outside?"

"Yes. Going for a spin."

"With a lady?"

"You don't think I am going to take a pug dog, do you?" Alston laughed, evasively.

"Sit down one minute, Edgar," his friend said, calmly. "I wish to speak with you."

"Mind you, I will not give you more than a couple of minutes," Edgar replied, impatiently. "And I would prefer that you wait until, say ten o'clock, when I will give you a call—on my honor, I will."

"It might be too late then," Hawley proceeded. "What I have to say is of the utmost importance. You must not go for this drive, Edgar."

"I must not, eh? Since when have you become my mentor, Edward Hawley?" was the savage retort.

"You are being fooled by the dancing woman known as Isabel Russell, a creature whose character is as black as hell!"

"Stop!" raved Alston, making a step forward. "Stop, I say, or I may forget the friendship that has existed between us."

"I say that she is an infamous woman!"

"Liar!"

"Ask Stimson. Reason, reflect. Are you mad?" shouted Hawley, now realizing that his friend's very nature had undergone some subtle change under the spells of the enchantress.

"In the future, Mr. Edward Hawley," cried Alston, his eyes glittering like those of a wild beast, "our paths lie apart. You have seen fit to insult the woman I love, the woman who is to be my wife, and for this I will never forgive you!"

He started to leave the room, furiously shaking off the detaining hand that Hawley placed upon his arm.

"Follow me, and I will shoot you as I would a dog, you accursed medler!" was his parting snarl.

Hurrying from the club, he seized the reins from the man who was minding the ponies, and sprang into the carriage, drove rapidly away, a hundred fires raging within him.

"At last," he muttered, "things will have to be precipitated—there must be an end to this espionage! One would think that I was an irresponsible child. I will tell Isabel all. I will gather from her lips what she expects of me, and it shall be done—I swear it!"

Being nearly half an hour in advance of the time agreed

upon, he drove toward the park, planning in his fevered mind how he should best approach his father in this matter that was life and death to him.

Promptly at six o'clock the spirited ponies were pulled up before the brown-stone apartment house in Park avenue, and ten minutes later the delighted fool was arranging the wraps about a graceful female figure, covered with costly furs—that were not paid for, and stood to the debit side of Mr. Edgar Alston! A pair of glorious black eyes were beaming upon him, and he felt that the world were well lost even for this brief spell of ecstasy!

And when the ponies rattled away, their silver trappings flashing bravely under the glow of the electric lights, Alston dreamed not that two pairs of eyes were watching him. He was securely entangled in the meshes that the siren had woven about him, and he had no wish to be free!

BOOK TWO.

LORD ST. LEONARDS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TONGUE OF THE TEMPTRESS.

Edgar Alston vowed that he had never enjoyed anything so much in the whole of his life as that ever memorable drive under the light of the stars and the moon. The ring of the horses' feet on the hard earth echoed for weeks after, like a refrain of sweetest music. In his nostrils was the delicate perfume of violets—in his heart a maddening delight.

"I have not thanked you for these lovely violets," Isabel said, with a ravishing upward glance. She wore a great bunch of the sweet flowers on her gently swelling bosom.

"You expressed a fondness for them," Edgar said, simply. "Your lightest wish is my command. I live but to please you."

His tones were full of passion—passion blazed in his eyes, and a ripple of the softest laughter left the siren's lips.

"You will spoil me, Edgar," she whispered.

It was not often that she used his name in this familiar way, and bending suddenly, he pressed his lips to her vailed cheek.

"I spoil you?" he said, rapturously. "Oh, Isabel, I am afraid at times that I shall wake to find this happiness an illusion!"

The pace of the ponies had been checked, and they were traveling steadily in the direction of Harlem.

"Do you love me so much, then?" she asked, softly.

"Isabel—Isabel! Why will you madden me? Do you not see that I am bound up in you eternally for good or evil? No matter how desperate the sacrifice I am called upon to make, I shall deem it a trifle light as air if I can but call you my own! I will not deceive you, Isabel. By wedding you, I shall lose my father's friendship—I can call it nothing more—but, what is of more value still, my sister's love. Our meetings cannot longer be kept secret. I have to-day been reproached by a man whom I once called friend, but who I would now shoot as coolly as if he were a dog if he dared—"

"If he dared?" she repeated, her eyes scintillating. "What has he already dared to do?"

"My darling, it does not matter."

"I say that I will know," Isabel Russell replied. "Oh, it is cruel that I should be so persecuted because I have had to earn my living—because I have been a common danseuse!"

She affected to cry softly, and Alston's disengaged arm stole round her slender waist.

"The moment a woman stands before the foot-lights," she went on, with a dash of anger, "her virtue is gone. She is a creature either to be sneered at, or made the sport of every man who likes to pour his insulting words in her ears. If she is handsome, women hate her, and the

men whom she ignores make light of her name in a spirit of revenge. Oh, the mean, pitiful things! If you listen to their wicked tongues, Mr. Alston—if you for one moment doubt me—I have no wish to see you again, though it will break my heart!"

"Isabel, my darling!" Alston cried. "I have not listened. Though the man who spoke unkindly of you has been my life-long friend, I threatened to shoot him dead at my feet, and, by Heaven, I would have done it! The man was Hawley, the scenic artist at the Frivolity. He adopted the role of sentimental friendship—curse his impudence!"

"Ah!" replied Isabel. "I am sure that if he knew me better, he would be my friend, against his employer, Mr. Stimson! But what does he know of me beyond the fact that I am a defenseless woman—that you are his friend? I am a singer—a dancer—you are a gentleman! Oh, my Heaven! it is cruel! cruel! This man Stimson knew me in Chicago. I made my debut there, and he paid me unwelcome attentions. I spurned him, and now you see what his motives are."

"The coward!" gritted fiercely through Alston's teeth.
"He shall answer to me! I will thrash him! Will you give
me the right?"

"No, no, Edgar; for my sake, no! He is not worth it he is not worth the danger into which it would lead you."

"Danger?" he ejaculated, scornfully. "I am not accounted a coward, Isabel. I must protect your honor! To insult you is worse than a personal insult offered to myself."

"I repeat that he is not worth it. Pay no attention to his slanderous tongue. When I called at the Frivolity, I did not dream of meeting him. It was a terrible shock to me."

Alston turned the ponies' heads, saying:

"I am that man's enemy. If we meet he shall feel my vengeance!"

"But do not let me come between you and Mr. Hawley," Isabel whispered. "His mind has been poisoned against me. He was only acting the part of a faithful friend by trying to warn you. Oh, I am a dreadful creature!"

She nestled closer to him, and his heart was thrilled to madness.

"It is sufficient that Hawley has spoken evil of you," he said; "therefore all is at an end between us. For your sake, I will sever every connection of the past. We will fly to the old world together! My father is nothing to me. I hate him for standing in my way. My sister I love, but brotherly love is forgotten in the unfathomable passion that we feel for each other."

"But, Edgar, dear, do not forget that we are both poor—do not——'

"I have thought of that," he growled, half-savagely, "and am content to lose all else but you. I will face my father at once, Isabel, and his maudlin dreams must come to an end. If he will not acknowledge you—if he will not provide for us—I will kill him!"

She shuddered, and clung to his arm beseechingly.

"No, no, Edgar! Oh, you must not frighten me in this way! You must not speak to your father yet. Can we not obtain money in some other way? You have free access to your father's coffers. You are his only son; it is yours by

right—at least half of his possessions. But, hush, what am I saying? I know so little of business and the ways of the world."

"How much would tempt you?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Tempt me?" she laughed. "How strangely you look and talk, Edgar! Your father is worth many millions. He is one of the greatest of New York's magnates. I heard his name even in far-away Chicago. Surely he would not begrudge you a few thousands! I know that we should not want more! If I were content to marry you while you have nothing, the pinch would come sooner or later, and you would begin to hate me."

"Hate you?"

"In time. Oh, darling, with all your knowledge of the world, your are but a child in these things! You have never known the misery of being poor, and I will never drag you into that horrible mire—because I love you too well."

He seized one of her hands, and pressed it madly to his lips.

"A few thousands!" he muttered. "A few thousands! You would never crave for more, my queen? Swear that you will be mine if I lay this sum at your feet!"

"It is not for me alone," she whispered. "Is it not for both—is it not to make us eternally happy? Edgar, the day that the money is yours, why need we longer delay? It will be sufficient—more than sufficient for our simple needs. We can live in Paris, in Rome, in London. Life will be an elysium!"

"A few thousands! Ay, fifty thousand! I swear that it shall be yours, darling—even if I had to rake hell itself!" A satanic smile flashed into her glorious eyes.

"Hush, dear! There must be no risks—no unpleasantness—or I cannot accept so many sacrifices at your hands.
I know that you love me—I know that you are all the
world to me; but there must be no scandal, at least until
we are beyond its wrath, or it would kill me. Things must
be so arranged that we shall be thousands of miles away
before any loss is discovered, if you are forced in extremities to take a little of what is rightfully yours."

He listened to the voice of the temptress—a devil in his heart. He felt that his father—the father whom he had always loved and respected, was a hateful impediment. He cursed his very name!

"Why should he stand between me and happiness?" he thought, furiously. "Why should he stand between me and the woman I love? I am no longer a child, and have been a weak fool even to give tacit consent to his selfish aspirations."

Then he spoke aloud, his tones husky with emotion:

"It shall be done, Isabel; love will find the way! I think that in my desperation I shall become cunning! I will make no blunder!"

She was satisfied, and the pressure of one of her little hands thrilled him through and through.

"You will come in, will you not?" she said, when they were nearing Park avenue. As though he could resist! "My Aunt Judith has arrived, and I must introduce you. She already knows that you are my favored lover. I could not keep that!"

There was a happy note in her tones—a mocking light in her flashing eyes. If the infatuated fool had known the truth! "I am almost sorry that Aunt Judith has come!" he replied. "I shall feel that some one is spying upon us."

She laughed merrily.

"Eight o'clock! I did not think that we had been out so long."

"The time has gone on fairy wings. It is ever so when we are happy!"

He pulled up the ponies, and assisted Isabel to alight, saying:

"I will take these animals to the stables. Expect me back again in twenty minutes. Au revoir!"

Isabel kissed the tips of her fingers to him, and he did not remove his eyes from her until she had vanished within the portals of the building.

"She is like some choice exotic," he thought. "No wonder that men worship at her shrine. It is perhaps best that this ogre of an aunt has come upon the scene to take care of one so beautiful. I shall never feel satisfied until she is mine, lest she be spirited away!"

The very suggestion of losing her sent a deadly chill into his heart.

Having surrendered the ponies and the carriage, he was taken back to Park avenue in a cab, and went through a formal introduction to the aunt of his goddess, who eyed him unobserved behind her smoke-colored spectacles.

"Jove!" thought Alston; "one would think it impossible for this tall, masculine-looking woman to be a blood relative of my goddess!"

Aunt Judith retired after supper, and Edgar was not agreeably surprised to discover that Isabel Russell could

take absinthe after her coffee in proportions equal to his own, but there was something immensely bewitching in the way she smoked her cigarettes.

When he thought of his gentle sister, he fancied her horror of a scene like this. But why make comparisons? Beside this splendid creature, Minnie was but a rush-light before the moon! Here was a woman of passions as strong as his own—a woman whose very presence swayed him into adoring submission.

So deeply was he sated with the follies—with the indulgencies that ever prostitute themselves before young men of fashion, weak of purpose and gilded with the dross that makes happiness and misery—so deeply sated was he that nothing would have appealed to his senses. Nothing would have satisfied his fierce desires for change, had it not been full of unhealthy excitement.

This woman, with her splendid beauty, her rare figure, her loud laughter and alluring ways, intoxicated him with madness. His finer instincts told him that he disapproved of the cigarettes, that the liquors which she drank so readily were scarcely in keeping with the future Mrs. Edgar Alston. Yet he was powerless to stay his mad career. He would not if he could, and he knelt at her feet and poured out his passion again and again.

"Isabel, within two weeks you shall be mine for evermore!" he said, fiercely. "Do you know what bitterness it is to have to leave you? Heavens! I cannot stand it! And I have to meet my father with a smiling face and agony in my heart—the agony of a bitter suspense!"

"Then let it nerve you to be up and doing, Edgar," was the siren's reply. "There is danger in delay. If he becomes suspicious, he may set a watch upon you, and then I shall have caused your ruin!"

"Why will you not marry me now?" he demanded, feverishly. "We could then face him, and when he saw that it was useless, he——"

"Would show us both the door!" was the mocking rejoinder. "No, Edgar; if we were so mad, it would end in my having to dance and sing in public to support us both in rags and squalor."

She went to the piano, and after running her deft fingers along the keys, sang these words in ravishing strains:

"To-day, dearest, is ours;
Why should love carelessly lose it?
This life shines or lowers,
Just as we, weak mortals, use it.
'Tis time enough, when its flowers decay'
To think of the thorns of sorrow;
And joy, if left on the stem to-day,
May wither before to-morrow.

"Then, why, dearest, so long
Let the sweet moments fly over?
Though now blooming and young,
Thou hast me devoutly thy lover.
Yet time from both in his silent lapse,
Some treasure may steal or borrow;
Thy charms may be less in bloom, perhaps,
Or I less in love to-morrow!"

Alston scarcely knew how he reached home that night. He had the sweet remembrance of a clinging kiss. He had turned suddenly in the door-way, and caught his goddess in a fierce embrace, and been surprised by Aunt Judith appearing before them. But it did not matter. Aunt Judith knew that they were engaged lovers—that they would soon be bound together by the laws of God and man.

There was only this between them—a few paltry thousands! And that? He laughed insanely as he reeled through the streets. He clinched his hands fiercely, and there was the fire of a desperate resolve in his heart!

When the door had closed behind him, when his echoing feet were heard in the street below, Aunt Judith tossed aside her spectacles and growled.

"Isabel, I felt like hurling that fool down stairs! I don't know how I am to endure this sort of thing much longer!"

"Shall I tell you how long, Gilbert?" smiled the siren. "Shall I tell you how long? He says that it is to be two weeks, and I will keep him to his word—I will keep him to his word!"

She hissed the last words.

Gilbert Roseberry looked at her admiringly.

"And then?" he whispered.

"Fifty thousand dollars! Perhaps more! I expect Palmer here to-morrow. From him I shall learn my chances with the old man. I will use this young fool until I have a firm hold on the elder one. I must give my fish plenty of line!"

She laid her hands on his shoulders, and said, anxiously:

"If you are in doubt, Gilbert—if you think that the police are likely to track you, why not go away in advance of me? I have money enough to send you away royally, thanks to young Alston."

"No," he replied, determinedly. "It is bad enough to endure this torture while I am near you; but, away!—I should go mad! Besides, every port is being watched. There is a big reward offered for my apprehension. I am honored with a couple of columns in a sensational evening paper, with a portrait that will save me if anything

will! Until the sensation has died out, I am safer in New York than anywhere else."

"You will meet Palmer on friendly terms?" she asked.
"He is working hand and glove with us. We cannot afford to do without him."

He frowned savagely.

"You know that I hate the fellow, that we are sworn foes! He sold me last time. By the living God, I believe that he put the police onto me, so that he could have you to himself!"

"Gilbert, you do him an injustice. But for his help you would not have been here now. Without him my present schemes will become childish. I am playing to win a fortune, so that we may live in clover for the rest of our days. You know that I love only you—at least, in this J am faithful."

"Have I ever doubted you, darling?" he asked, brokenly.
"I only hate and fear Mitford Palmer. I won you from him, and he has followed us like a sleuth-hound, professing friendship. He is as subtle as the devil!"

"Our instincts are one now," she told him, her face blanching before the deadly fire in his eyes. "He shares equally with me—with us. A paltry few thousands to divide will not satisfy me when there is so much to scheme for."

She laughed shrilly, her red lips parting and showing two rows of gleaming white teeth.

Gilbert Roseberry paced the floor with uneasy strides.

"It would be safer," he muttered, "to quit at once with hardly a dollar in our pockets. If he betrayed me at the last, Isabel—if he betrayed me at the last."

"Then I would shoot him dead, or bury a dagger in his heart with my own hand!" she hissed. "Do you hear me, Gilbert, and do you think I would falter?"

She drew herself up to her full height, her great eyes blazing, her white hands clinched.

"No, I don't think you would, Isabel."

At that moment the door opened, and Lucy announced that Mr. Mitford Palmer was without.

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"Show him in," said Isabel Russell, calmly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LIVELY SCHEME.

Mitford Palmer came into the room with a swift, catlike tread. He glanced at Roseberry, smiled at his disguise, and walked forward with outstretched hand.

"I am glad that you are out, old man," he said. "We are friends, I hope?"

"Yes," was the somewhat surly rejoinder. "I have half-doubted you, but Isabel speaks in your favor."

"I have done all I could for you," Palmer said; "and I will make no promises for the future. Actions speak louder than words. It is childich to nurse an old grievance. But for the fact of young Alston being so near to you, after your escape, I should have ventured to your relief, dangerous though the experiment might have been. The cipher in the Herald told you that."

"Yes," admitted Roseberry.

He held out his hand now, and the other shook it heartily.

"I ran the risk of receiving your letters at Brooklyn, so that Isabel should never be suspected of aiding you."

Roseberry glanced at him swiftly, and remarked:

"You always were very considerate where my wife was concerned."

"Let that pass, old man. I am not going to quarrel with you. I have never done time myself yet, but others have told me that it sours the best of men. I have your letter here still, and in answer to it put the cipher in the New York Herald. I rented a furnished room at the address you wrote to in Brooklyn, and was supposed to be an old woman who went out washing by the day. I passed the place out of curiosity this morning, and observed that it was in the hands of the police."

He laughed lightly.

"You have my last letter?" asked Roseberry. "I should like to see it once more and then destroy it."

"It is yours," replied Palmer, taking from his pocketbook an artfully constructed enigmatical letter headed "Frankfort State Prison," at which Roseberry gazed with mixed emotions.

Attached to it was a solution of the puzzle in the handwriting of Isabel, which read as follows:

"Shall escape midnight of tenth, and board freight car to tunnel between Covington and Bridgley."

"My warden was all right, but one never knows to whom the letters are submitted before they are sent to the mail."

"You had assistance from the inside?" suggested Palmer, adding quickly, "and outside, too. I hope that you appreciate the fact that I have put my head in the noose equally with you, and that we pull together now, for good or evil?"

"I have yet to learn what schemes are on foot. I must admit that your appearance is vastly improved by the dye in your hair and mustache. Dark-brown is preferable to red at any time, and a face the type of yours is the better for being half-hidden by a carefully trimmed beard."

"Thanks! You would have passed me in the street without a nod of recognition?"

"I certainly should. You appear to be in clover," Roseberry said, scanning the other from head to foot, and letting his eyes rest upon a flashing diamond stud in the spotless shirt-front.

"Yes," responded Mitford Palmer, airily. "I wonder if my lady will permit smoking in this bower of roses? I have some rare cigars here worth half a dollar apiece. Try one?"

Roseberry gazed hungrily at the fragrant tobacco, saying:

"Imported?"

"Yes, choice Havanas. Mr. Jabez Alston is one of those rabid Americans who spend their money on foreign goods. His clothes are made by a London tailor, his furniture, his horses, his dogs, are all imported. Now his great idea is to purchase a dilapidated castle from some bankrupt nobleman in England, marry his two children to titled Britishers, because the United States is no fit place for a gentleman to live in! Ha! ha! By the way, his respected mamma sold bananas in the days of her youth in the streets of this city."

"You may have no scruples about smoking here, gentlemen," Isabel said, with one of her silvery laughs. "The
lace curtains are already redolent with tobacco smoke!
What will you take to drink? My sideboard is wellstocked, and I can serve the liquors in cut glass decanters which sparkle in unison with our own bright
spirits. All at the expense of the generous Mr. Edgar
Alston!"

She tripped away, flashing upon the men one of her bewildering glances, and Roseberry gazed at his companion in wonderment.

"You speak of Jabez Alston, the father of the young fool whom Isabel is fleecing, as a personal friend," he said, biting the end off his cigar.

"You have hit it exactly, but let me continue my story in the presence of Isabel. What do you think of these Havanas?"

"Dusedly good!"

The table was soon sparkling with glass and wines of the choicest vintage, and while the men talked, Isabel reclined on a satin divan, eagerly watching every expression of their faces.

"It is all summed up in a nut-shell," proceeded Palmer. "Not knowing which way to turn a few weeks since, I was walking down Broadway, praying that I might meet a confederate whom I could trust to assist me in playing a new confidence trick which my fertile brain had just evolved, when I was tapped on the shoulder by a stranger. I am too old a hand to start or change a hair, although I expected to come face to face with a detective, though I was pretty sure of my present disguise, and generally manage to cover my tracks."

"You are right there," was the sarcastic observation from Roseberry.

"Well, you can imagine my astonishment," proceeded Palmer, as though unmindful of the interruption, "when I found myself being addressed as St. Leonards, by Mr. Terhune, the up-town banker. By sight, I knew him well, and in an instant it flashed upon me that I really did re-

semble Lord St. Leonards, a sportively inclined peer of the British realm, who came out here to look for an American heiress last fall, and is now in Australia."

Roseberry whistled, and his eyes sparkled with interest.

"I have elbowed Lord St. Leonards more than once at the Derby and Doncaster races; I have met him behind the scenes at the London Gayety, and being an Englishman, can imitate his drawl in a way that would deceive the devil himself."

Roseberry nodded, while Isabel indulged in merry laughter.

Palmer eyed the burning tip of his cigar reflectively for a minute, then went on:

"I looked the banker steadily in the eyes, to see if he was likely to discover his error, but found that he was energetically shaking my paw.

"Bah, Jove, Terhune! I drawled. 'Jolly glad to meet you. How are you, old chap?'

"He was delighted by my familiarity, and begged of me to lunch with him at Delmonico's. The temptation was strong, for I hadn't had a square meal for nearly forty-eight hours, but the fear of spoiling a good thing held me back. I hadn't ten cents about me. My watch, chain, and rings had already sought repose in the pawnbroker's safe, and the less said about my linen the better.

"'I thought that you had sailed for Australia last week in the Concordia,' he said. 'You must really dine with me once before you leave New York.'

"'See you to-morrow morning at the bank, dear boy,' I replied desperately. 'Ta-ta!'

"I had only one friend in whom I could confide—your wife, Roseberry—and together we elaborated a little scheme. She provided me with sufficient money to make a respectable showing, the idea being to tap the banker for as much as I could. With the regulation eye-glass of the British swell, and the exact tint of St. Leonards' beard added to my own, a new suit of clothes, etc., and a slight stoop in the shoulders, I called upon the banker, having been careful in the meantime to trace the real St. Leonards' movements. He had sailed for Australia with a party of friends. I explained that at the last moment I had decided not to go, and had not troubled to contradict the reports in the society papers, adding:

"'It is a dused relief, bah, Jove! not to be known!"

"I dined with the banker at his place in Fifth avenue, and two days later was introduced to the greatest financier in New York, Mr. Jabez Alston. I am now very much run after by that astute millionaire, because he wants me to marry his daughter! And release my ancestral castle in England from the hands of the Jews! He has diligently perused Debrett and Burke, and it is arranged that I entertain the Alston family at my London town house during the height of the season, introduce them to the cream of the beau monde, and make love to the charming Miss Minnie Alston! In the meanwhile, Isabel has added the son to her train, and it depends upon coming events how we shall further shape our plans. I am keeping in direct touch with the elder Alston, while Isabel——"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"It is clever—devilishly clever," said Roseberry, admiringly, "and well worth the risk. Isabel feels sure that

the young one is good for a substantial sum, but there are the chances that he will fail. What then?"

"In any event she will get hold of the millionaire himself!" replied Palmer, with a short laugh. "It would be madness for me to attempt to squeeze him for an amount worth having. This is the chance of our lives. Through the son we will reach the father, and if my faith in Isabel's power is not at fault, there is no escape for him!"

He turned his eyes toward the beautiful, smiling siren, and a fierce passion slumbered in their depths—a passion that had lived with him since he first beheld her.

"And I am to play a passive part," Roseberry grumbled.
"It is rather unusual for me."

"The result of circumstances, old man," was Palmer's soothing reply. "And there is really nothing for you to do but watch and wait. Then for freedom! light hearts, and heavy purses!"

They drank to the toast and continued the discussion until the small hours of the morning.

"I will stay here and breakfast with you," Palmer announced, finally. "It would be bad policy to risk disturbing the janitor at this hour, and a shake-down anywhere will do for me."

When he was alone he shook his fist vengefully in the direction of Gilbert Roseberry, muttering:

"Why did I help you from the State prison of Frank-fort—why did I cover your escape? Because I wished to propitiate her—the one woman for me, and to make sure that you do not escape me next time! There is not room for both of us in this world, Gilbert Roseberry! You think that you will share in this scheme, eh? You think that

you will fly with her and a fortune! You may if I do not contrive to have you put forever out of my path! Fool! to dream for one moment that I would forego the revenge I have sworn to have?"

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CHAPTER IX.

"I MUST BUY THE PAINTED JEZEBEL!"

With Edgar Alston's sober moments came a strong revulsion of feeling, and he viewed with terror the thoughts that were in his heart a few hours before.

"What madness was in my blood?" he muttered. "I felt that I was capable of murder! My father has ever been good and kind to me. I have only his vanity to complain of—a vanity which makes him selfish and careless of the happiness of his children."

He thought of his sister, and murmured:

"Poor little girl! I know that she hates this St. Leonards, and cares for the scenic artist."

His lip curled, and his eye flashed.

"I can never call him friend again. Curse his insolence! Am I a child, to be tutored and warned by him? Isabel's ways of living may be Bohemian; but when we are married, all that I can correct. I have no wish to make an exile of myself, and that will only be the result of my very last resource. I will yet introduce the most beautiful woman in the world among the best blood of New York as my honored wife!"

It was late when he ventured down stairs next morning. His brain throbbed madly, and there were dark rings under his eyes.

"Eleven o'clock!" he exclaimed to his sister who was

regarding him with troubled eyes, for in her bosom reposed a note from Edward Hawley. It read in this way:

"My Darling:—It is an abominable shame that my first letter to you should contain anything but pleasant news. I saw Edgar at his club, and tried to remonstrate with him gently. It only maddened him. This Isabel Russell has him completely under her thumb. I never dreamed it possible for a man to become so infatuated with a bad woman. Our only course is to hunt up her antecedents, trusting that she is guilty of something which may put a bar between her and your headstrong brother. To this end Mr. Stimson is communicating with the police of Chicago. He says that she was mixed up with some scandal there, and had to fly from the city. To appeal to your father would be useless, for Edgar would at once become desperate. I will call this afternoon at three o'clock. "Yours devotedly,

"EDWARD HAWLEY."

"Eleven o'clock!" repeated Minnie. "Oh, you lazy boy! Papa left an hour since for business."

"My head is on fire," Edgar groaned. "I think that I shall stay indoors to-day and recruit myself for steady work."

His sister glanced at him hopefully.

"What am I to infer by that?" she asked. "Are you really going to give up all your doubtful acquaintances?"

"Doubtful acquaintances?" he frowned. "I hope that I am not booked for another sermon! If so, I will efface myself instanter! I am just about sick of being preached to! I am not ashamed of the people I call my friends, and if my relations are—well, they can be if they choose! And look here. Miss Alston! if you refer in a roundabout way to Miss Isabel Russell, understand that I don't appreciate any remarks to the disparagement of the woman who is to be my wife—and your sister-in-law, whether you like it or not."

He stamped across the floor and then felt half ashamed of himself when he saw the piteous look in Minnie's eyes.

"I am a brute, I know," he went on, remorsefully, "but it is all because I have been misunderstood." He meant that he had always been a wild, eccentric, vacillating fool. "Forgive me, little sister. I do not believe that I have a true friend in all the world besides you. And, see here! if that Lord St. Leonards annoys you, by Heaven I'll break his infernal neck!"

Minnie laughed outright now.

"He does not annoy me," she said, truthfully. "So far papa appears to be of more interest to him than any one else."

"That's one point in his favor. I won't have you badgered by the impecunious British ape! He's after money; and if he manages to scoop a hatful, it will cure the old man of his folly!"

This appeared to be a brilliant idea, and Edgar determined to cultivate the acquaintance of Lord St. Leonards for the purpose of ascertaining his exact financial condition.

"Very likely got a wife in his eye," he added. "And if he can get an advance of ten thousand, he will clear out and leave us to ourselves, and papa repentant! That's his measure!"

Minnie was regarding him seriously again, and he fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"Yes," he went on, "I have told you her name, Minnie, because I intend facing the matter out with my father. She is none other than Isabel Russell, the actress, but none the less a perfect lady, and the most perfect woman

on God's earth. Talking of coronets—if she chose, she could have her pick of a dozen! but she prefers your wild, erratic brother to all the men she has ever seen, and within two weeks will be my wife. If my father turns me up, then I shall appeal to Aunt Radcliffe! In time all will come right."

He spoke cheerfully until he remembered the words of Edward Hawley, "An infamous woman!"

"There is one man," he said, "whom I can never forgive, painful though it may be to you, Minnie! But for me he might have been begging on the streets, and his gratitude is of the old sort! The viper that you've nurtured turns and stings at the first opportunity."

Minnie's face had grown pale, and there was fire in her eyes.

"Edgar," she replied, "if you cannot be generous, at least be just. It is despicably mean to speak in such terms of one who has been a faithful friend to you."

He glared at her.

"What do you know of this?"

"I will have no secrets from you. I wrote to Mr. Hawley to inform me who this Isabel was of whom you have talked so much lately. He came——"

"And made love to you!" sneered her brother, savagely, his eyes exulting when the hot blood flushed her neck and face. "H'm! I thought so. Very artful of you, I am sure. You interfere in my love affairs for the sake of making a few steps forward with your own! Really, I think that papa would sooner accept Isabel Russell as a daughter-in-law than the poverty-stricken Edward Hawley as your husband. So he did your bidding yesterday, Miss Alston!

And I hold you in the same contempt that I hold him, the pitiful sneak!"

Without waiting for a reply, he dashed out of the house, and a minute later his outraged sister saw him walking swiftly in the direction of Broadway.

After wandering about aimlessly for an hour, he drove to Park avenue, and the hour being rather early for a call, he sent up his card to Isabel Russell, by the janitor. The latter soon returned, saying that the lady was out.

"Do you know when she will he home again?" he asked. He pressed a douceur in the shape of a five-dollar bill into the man's hand.

"It's my belief that she is still abed," the janitor whispered. "I saw lights burning in the rooms the best part of the night. There's no reason for you to mention anything, sir, because we don't want to offend a tenant who pays the rent promptly."

He did not know that he was speaking to the man who paid for everything.

"The lady had a visitor, sir," the janitor added, with a smile.

"Yes-yes! Her aunt."

"No, sir! It was a gentleman—a regular swell! Dark beard and mustache, and eye-glasses. He staid all night, I guess, for I saw him slipping out pretty early this morning."

You are sure of this?" demanded Alston, hoarsely.

"No mistake, sir. I took him up to the lady's rooms last night just after you left, and he didn't leave till eight o'clock this morning while I was sweeping out the vestibule." "Heavens!" gasped Alston, jealous and furious. "But, pshaw! there must be some mistake!"

He went into the street with reeling brain.

"Some of her actor acquaintances! The fellow did not stay all night. I will never believe it. A swell with a brown beard and mustache. Eye-glasses! I shall know him again! I will shoot him dead! I will go back in an hour."

He turned in the direction of his club, and having found a corner free from observation, ordered some brandy, and half a dozen cigars. His nerves were completely shattered.

"The fellow did not stay all night," he repeated again and again. "The janitor was mistaken. No, no, it cannot be!"

He could not forget Hawley's words, "An infamous woman!" They rang in his ears incessantly, and he hated the friend of his boyhood for it. A sudden inspiration caused him to leap to his feet with a savage oath. Had Edward Hawley dared to call upon Isabel Russell—had he dared to warn her at the instance of the manager of the Frivolity? But Hawley wore no beard, and his mustache was fair—almost golden.

"Yet it is some of his interference," he decided, wrathfully. "He sent some fellow who failed to see Isabel last night and called again this morning."

Though he argued with himself in this specious way, it gave him no real satisfaction. He would know no peace until he had seen Isabel Russell.

More brandy was supplied him, and he experienced a warm relief from its generous fire.

He was lighting a second cigar, when he heard his name

mentioned, and saw St. Leonards speaking to an attendant.

"Heavens!" he muttered. "A regular swell! Brown beard and mustache, and eye-glasses! His description exactly! Can he have been doing the amiable spy for the governor?"

"Hallo! Alston!" drawled his lordship. "So there you are, bah Jove! I was just passing, you know, and as you generally hang out here, I thought I would ask for you. How are you, dear boy?"

"Seedy—dused seedy! Sit down. What will you take?"
Alston had hitherto treated Lord St. Leonards with scant respect, but he had now a two-fold object in view in being as civil as possible.

"Aw—a small glass—a liqueur glass of green chartreuse, dear boy. Splendid tonic, bah Jove! I have some cigars—thanks! Two of those choice Havanas your papa gave to me."

"What's his game?" thought Alston. "Can it be a chance call?"

They smoked in silence for a few minutes, then Alston blurted out.

"See here, St. Leonards. Do you know a lady named Russell?"

His lordship started slightly, then smiled blandly.

"Do I know a lady named Russell?" he repeated. "Cortainly, dear boy, at least half a dozen."

"Here—in New York?"

Alston's tones were imperative. He had drank too much brandy to preserve his caution for any length of time. Under the most favorable circumstances he was no

natch for the man who called himself Lord St. Leonards.

"In New York," smiled his lordship. "You are narrowing the limits, dear boy, and I do not think I am obliged to answer you."

"I insist!" cried Alston. "By heavens! I will take no equivocation. A lady's honor is at stake!"

"Then the matter does not concern me in the least, Mr. Alston." was the haughty rejoinder. "And, bah Jove, I object to your vulgar manner. On the race-course such language is tolerated, but not in private clubs whose members should be gentlemen!"

He rose languidly to his feet, and again the janitor's words flashed into Alston's mind, "Dark beard and mustache, and eye-glasses!"

"My lord," he said, with a desperate effort to be calm, "pardon my impetuosity. I have reasons—very strong reasons—for asking you this question. You have admitted knowing a lady named Russell——"

"Several ladies," corrected Lord St. Leonards, smilingly.

"Now will you answer me solemnly and truthfully, as man to man—are you acquainted with Miss Isabel Russell, at present residing in Park avenue?"

Alston glared at his companion, while the latter adjusted his eye-glass, and replied, frigidly:

"Mr. Alston, the lady you mention is an acquaintance—a valued friend, bah Jove! Be careful what you say, sir!" He looked threateningly at Edgar, adding, fiercely:

"No man shall insult her in my presence."

"You went to her apartments late last night?" persisted Alston.

"I did, but she had either not arrived home from her professional duties, or had retired, I forget which."

Hope began to rise in Alston's heart.

"I went away," concluded his lordship, "and left my card again this morning. I haven't seen Miss Russell for three years. I was then in Chicago, and her people were in affluent circumstances. She was in society, and the belle of Chicago. I might have fallen in love with her, as every other man did, had she not put an end to my aspirations in short order. After that we were fast friends, and I only saw in the Dramatic Mirror yesterday morning that she had apartments in Park avenue. Now, sir, what more have you to say?"

"Sit down, St. Leonards," Alston replied, huskily. "You are a brick, and no mistake. Until now I have not felt very kindly toward you, but I believe from this moment that we shall be close friends."

"Aw—I do not admire your advances!" was the haughty reply of the aristocrat. "In turn, my dear sir, I must request that you explain your enigmatical remarks concerning a lady whom I honor, even if she is—aw—forced to earn her living on the stage."

"Bless you for those words, Lord St. Leonards; I will not forget them readily; and if I can forward any wishes of yours, by Heaven, you can command me!"

"To the devil with Hawley!" was his inward thought.

"The governor was right in his estimate of this man after all!"

[&]quot;You have--"

[&]quot;One moment," interrupted Alston. "To be brief, Miss Isabel Russell is my affianced wife!"

Lord St. Leonards fell back a pace, a cry of astonishment escaping him involuntarily.

"Bah Jove! No! Really, I am astounded!"

"And when the lunatic old janitor told me this morning that a man—describing you—had spent the night in Miss Russell's apartments, I was furious, though I did not believe a word of it."

"You ought not to have listened! If Miss Russell knew that you had suspected her, she would never forgive you, bah Jove! Her pride is devilish. Never saw a woman who could stand off a man as she can. Magnificent creature, bah Jove!"

Alston smiled proudly. She belonged to him. She was never cold to him!

"You will say not one word of this?" he pleaded. "And it may be—it may be that we can materially assist each other. Have another drink. Come! it won't hurt you."

His lordship demurred, but finally consented to take another glass of chartreuse.

"So she is the lady of your choice" he said, "though not of your father's!"

A dark flush mounted to Edgar Alston's cheek.

"You may be able to help me in this," he said. "And I—I can influence my sister in your favor. There is nothing between you but a beggarly scene-painter." He laughed maliciously. "You know my father's pet scheme. He has a horror of women connected with the stage, and so far I have not dared to mention Miss Russell to him. He would listen to you, though—you who have known her so long, and can youch for her excellent family connections."

"My dear fellow, I will do my best for you-fact; but

your father is a man of very pronounced opinions. In assisting you, I may ruin my own cause. I am fond of your sister—extremely," drawled St. Leonards. "You are a man, Alston, and should not be accountable to a father for your actions. Marry the lady, and to the duse with him!"

"I am dependent upon his bounty," hissed Edgar, savagely. "And she—I cannot blame her—has given me to understand that it would be folly to wed on nothing."

"On nothing? Aren't you a partner in the firm of Alston & Co.?" St. Leonards demanded, in surprise.

"A partner?" snarled Edgar. "No! a pauper, if my father says so!"

"Bah Jove!" ejaculated his lordship. "Look here, dear boy! there is only one way of treating such a thoughtless father. Now look you! I am a man of the world. I am not a millionaire, but I have lost on the turf more than your father ever had, and my backing is still good. You are short of money, and you want to be independent of the old boy. I understand it. Say for six months. He'll come round in six months, perhaps less. What is the amount you are short of? Speak freely, for I am in sympathy with you."

There were tears of emotion in his lordship's tones, and he grasped one of Alston's hands warmly.

"I want fifty thousand dollars!" blurted out Edgar.

He expected to see St. Leonards appalled, but his lord-ship only smiled.

"Is that all?" he said, indifferently. "Ten thousand pounds! It does not sound much in pounds! Tell your father the whole story—don't mince matters—and if he

turns up rough, and won't find you the money, then I will!"

"You?"

He kissed St. Leonards' hand.

"But how am I ever to repay you?"

"Don't trouble about that. Don't forget that I shall be your brother-in-law before the note becomes due. We will make it six months, and at the worst it can be renewed again for another six months, at six per cent. My man of business in London will forward the money through any banker in New York."

"But the delay?" Alston said, feverishly.

"There will be little delay. You forget that I can cable. I can be very business-like when a friend is cornered! We Britishers are considered old and surly, but we have warm and constant hearts."

"I believe you!" gulped Alston, brokenly. "St. Leonards, you have taken a load from my heart. Do you know that I have been tempted to steal the money?"

"Never!"

His lordship was horrified.

"I have been tempted to steal it. I have even felt that I could hurl my father from my path. I have almost cursed him! At times my love for Isabel Russell amounts to frenzy!"

"Poor old chappie! To steal it would mean to be found out at once, bah Jove! You would not like the woman you adore to be arrested for receiving stolen money, eh? Pshaw! The idea is childish. For her sake I would not permit you to do it. I am her friend!"

"My Heaven! how I have misjudged you, St. Leon-

ards! I shall never forgive myself! But I will undo the past!"

St. Leonards pressed his hand affectionately.

"You were merely prejudiced against me, dear boy. I have seen it all along. Now take my advice, and have it out with your father to-night. It is not manly to delay. Keep away from Miss Russell until it is settled. I will see Mr. Alston at his office, and put in a few words in advance. It will break the ice. Candidly, I do not believe that he will give his consent, and will rely upon the tight rein he has upon you to pull you in. One caution—he must not know that I am helping you with money."

"I understand," the poor dupe murmured, gratefully. "Heaven bless you! I will take your advice in all things, though I hardly know how I shall live without seeing my darling!"

"All lovers feel that sort of thing," smiled the peer. "I did in the heyday of youth. I am nearly forty now, and consequently a little more philosophical. Your father lunches at two."

He glanced at his watch.

"I shall just catch him. Now, obey me in all things, and the troubles shall all end as they do in the fairy stories. Promise."

"I promise," replied Edgar.

"And you will keep away from Park avenue until you have seen me to-morrow? Say at this place at noon?"

"That will suit me," Edgar said, wistfully, "though I should like to see Miss Russell before then. A whole twenty-four hours!"

"But you will not. The business in hand is too urgent."

St. Leonards smiled. "You will report to me here to-morrow, and if Mr. Alston sees fit to carry matters with a high hand, you can do without him, dear boy. Ta-ta!"

He shook hands with Edgar and stepped out of the room. After walking a couple of hundred yards, he hired a cab and drove to Park avenue in hot haste, where he held a short interview with Isabel.

From Park avenue he was taken to Mr. Jabez Alston's office, and met the great financier in the door-way drawing on his gloves.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Lord St. Leonards," exclaimed Jabez Alston. He spoke loudly, so that others might hear that he was on familiar terms with a British peer. "You will lunch with me, I know!"

"Yes!" replied St. Leonards, languidly. He had dismissed his cab a couple of blocks away.

"This is my coupe," announced the financier. "I will take you to Delmonico's. We shall not meet many of the Wall street gamblers there, and I have reasons for not desiring to be too much in evidence for a few days. A big crisis is at hand which may ruin hundreds of the smaller fry."

He chuckled.

"After this, if the cards run my way, as they most assuredly will, I think I shall retire from business."

They drove away, and were sumptuously dined by the king of caterers.

"Yes," Mr. Alston said, over his wine, "I shall quit business at once, and prepare for my trip to London, my lord. With this in view I have never seen the necessity for my son Edgar to settle down in harness. He has en-

joyed himself ad libitum, and I have never stood in his way. I think young men are always better after being permitted for a time to go the pace without restraint—young men, I should say, who eventually inherit vast fortunes. If you chain a boy up, he rushes into excesses when he gains his freedom—excesses which appall those who are unshackled."

"Bah Jove!" said his lordship, enthusiastically. "When you do become my guest, you shall be treated royally, my dear sir! I will show you what it is to live as gentlemen live who enjoy life to the full. An Englishman at sixty does not look so old as the average American at fifty. Too many hours, Mr. Alston, and too much grasping after the dollar! They are in harness until old Charon comes to ferry their souls to the other shore! In England the country grocer even strives to retire at sixty, and live somewhere away from the scene of his labors, where he potters in a strip of garden with a summer arbor at the end of it in which to smoke the pipe of peace!"

"I believe you," the financier said. "And have no intention of harassing myself into the grave. In a couple of months I shall resign myself and my family to your care, my lord."

"I am honored," replied the peer, with a covert smile.

They were driven back to the dingy office in Wall street, and then St. Leonards asked for five minutes' privacy with the great magnate. Already a dozen men with haggard faces and glistening eyes were desiring an audience with him.

"Certainly, my lord! Burrows," to his confidential clerk, "do not let me be disturbed until I ring."

The clerk retired, and St. Leonards faced the financier.

"Mr. Alston, I would not employ one minute of your time if I did not think it absolutely necessary," his lord-ship said. "You may think that I am presumptuous to interfere in what may, after all, be purely a family matter; but I have not lost sight of the fact that you have confided to me some of your desires—that some day I may win the hand of your beauteous daughter."

Jabez Alston smiled pleasantly, but he felt apprehensive.

"What I have to say, sir, concerns your son. I regret almost that he should have confided in me, because it is my duty to at once inform you that he fancies himself in love with an actress—not only that, he is determined to marry her, and this evening will ask for your permission and a suitable settlement."

"Great Heaven!" gasped the financier.

"You must meet him coolly—calmly—firmly. Do not let him suspect that I have done otherwise than break the news gently to you. I told him that it was my duty to do this."

"Thank you, my lord—thank you!"

Jabez Alston paced the floor in a frenzy of passion.

"An actress!" he muttered. "The fool—the fool! I must take him away—or buy her off." Then he turned to St. Leonards. "What kind of creature is this actress, my lord?"

"A handsome woman. I was in love with her myself once, bah Jove! or thought I was. There! I do not think that I need waste more of your time, Mr. Alston. You are now prepared to meet Edgar. It would have been awkward to have the bomb hurled at you unawares!"

"You are very thoughtful, and I shall not forget it, my lord."

Jabez Alston's face was pale, and his lips twitched nervously.

"I have always feared something of this kind; but an actress is worse than a girl clerk. Yes, there is only one way out of it, I fear. I must buy the painted Jezebel! Curse the women, I say!"

Lord St. Leonards took his leave, a sardonic smile on his face.

CHAPTER X.

ST. LEONARDS' FINE HAND.

After St. Leonards was gone, Edgar Alston almost hugged himself with delight. He did not for a moment doubt the nobleman's ability to assist him. He had no reason to suspect him of treacherous dealings. The only point which he rebelled against was absenting himself from the woman who had enslaved him.

"He will expect some return for this," he thought, "and I shall ever consider myself his debtor! And then his kind words concerning my darling! Her connections are equal to my own, and now I defy the whole world! What blessed news for Isabel!"

He dispatched a messenger to the nearest telegraph office with the following:

"ISABEL RUSSELL, No. —— Park Avenue:—All is arranged. I shall be with you to-morrow. E. A."

He smoked another cigar, and rehearsed again and again the scene that was to take place between himself and his father. During this fanciful dialogue, in which he appeared truly heroic, and came off with flying colors, he imbibed several more glasses of brandy. He had taken a great liking to stimulants since indulging in absinthe. The moral coward always flies to drink to either drown his sorrows or bolster him up with fictitious courage.

At three o'clock he prepared to return home. He told himself that he would have a warm bath. Nothing like a bath to straighten a man when he feels overwrought. His father would be home at five. He knew that he could depend upon that, for Jabez Alston was the soul of punctuality. He considered it quite as necessary to take his meals regularly, as to honor his notes at maturity.

"I shall tackle him at once," Edgar decided. "What is the use of deferring the battle?"

He called for his ulster, and saw Detective Hawkley standing in the door-way.

"Excuse me for interrupting you, Mr. Alston," Hawkley said.

"Well, sir?"

There was fire in the young man's eyes.

"I wish that you would meet me on a more friendly footing. You may value my services some day—perhaps much sooner than you think."

"You are a fool!" was the polite retort. "For Heaven's sake let me alone."

"I rather fancy he is the greater fool of the two," Mr. Hawkley thought to himself; then said, aloud:

"I have been waiting outside for you since half-past one, Mr. Alston."

"Indeed! It is like your infernal impudence!"

"I only wished to ask you the name of the gentleman who was in here with you some time since," continued the detective, calmly.

"Oh, there is no doubt that he is your escaped convict, my sapient friend!" sneered Alston. "Why didn't you lock him up on sight? See here, how much will you take to let me alone? I don't wish to assault you, but by Heaven, I shall do so if you continue to dog my steps!"

The detective laughed.

"I'll take a cigar if you don't object, sir. No offense! I mean well by you."

He took a bit of a pasteboard from his card-case, adding:

"That is my private address, and you'll send for me within a month. Mark my words!"

Alston took the card mechanically, and read:

NATHANIEL HAWKLEY, Detective,

No. — East Thirty-fourth St., New York City.

"I will take care of your address, Hawkley," Alston said, "but it won't be long before you are removed to an asylum for the insane! You are the crankiest crank I ever met!"

His good humor had returned.

"I am obliged for your good opinion, sir!" replied Hawkley, with a smile. "Thank you for the cigar. I know a good weed when I see one. Your friend was Lord St. Leonards, I believe?"

"Get out and mind your own business," was Alston's reply.

Hawkley accompanied him to the door, and they parted with some light banter.

"Lord St. Leonards!" muttered Nat, as he watched Alston into a cab. "I was quite under the impression that he had gone to Australia! And what was he doing at the Russell nest in Park avenue? There is a deep game somewhere."

Arrived at home, Edgar went to his own room, where he placed himself in the hands of his valet. He had no wish to see his sister at present, and his air was particularly defiant. "I shall let the governor know that Hawley comes here secretly. He is a sneak. None but a sneak would do it. No doubt he dreams of easy times again, on our money!"

His conscience did not suffer a single twinge. He detested his old chum for interfering between himself and his goddess. He had no sympathy with his sister, now that he was upon such excellent terms with Lord St. Leonards.

"Bring me a nip of brandy, Richard," he said to his valet. "That cold bath has chilled me through and through. I am not at all myself lately."

The valet smiled inwardly.

"It is very possible, Richard, that I shall want you to go away with me on short notice," he went on, after gulping down a copious draught of the fiery spirit.

"Yes, sir?" interrogatively.

"I am going to be married soon. Now not a word to any of the servants. It is rather sudden, but the family will know all about it within an hour."

Richard made a grimace behind his master's back.

"With your father's permission, I shall be glad to go with you, sir," he said.

There was not much sincerity in his tones, because Richard Streckfuss appreciated a comfortable home. He performed the duties of valet to both father and son, and cared little for the erratic ways of his young master.

"My father's permission? Pshaw! I am heartily sick of playing second fiddle!"

His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were sullen with rage.

"Is any one about the house?" he demanded. "I mean

any visitors? The place is never free from some canting hypocrite."

"Only Mr. Hawley, sir! He is in the west drawing-room."

"Hawley!" he yelled. "The miserable cur!"

His brain was on fire, and he had reached the door with a bound.

"An infamous woman!" he hissed. "My Isabel is an infamous woman, is she? Curse him!"

A dozen flying leaps landed him in the west drawingroom like a human tornado, and Edward Hawley sprang to his feet, while Minnie uttered a cry of astonishment and fear.

"So I have caught you, despicable cur that you are!" Alston snarled. "You steal into my father's house when he is away, and try to make misery with your slimy tongue, you pauper! Let me tell you that you will never marry my sister, and I will put an end to your sneaking visits here!"

"Edgar Alston!"

Hawley's tones were thunderous, and his blue eyes blazed.

"Begone, sir! Out of my father's house before I have you kicked into the street by the servants!"

"But for your sister's presence I would make you eat your words," Hawley retorted, suppressing his righteous passion. "Pshaw! you are drunk! Miss Alston, I will not prolong this wretched scene. You can answer for me, and the honesty of my motives."

He pressed her hand affectionately, and saw with rising

passion how piteously her lips trembled. "Good-by. He will beg my pardon some day!"

He turned to leave the room, but was met by a savage blow, that left a livid mark on his face.

"Coward!" hissed Alston. "That is for the words you hurled at me when you called my future wife an infamous woman! Now retaliate if you have the manliness to do so!"

In a moment Minnie was between the two enraged men, her face deathly white, her whole form quivering.

"You are drunk!" Hawley said, in contemptuous tones, "and I repeat that some day you will beg my pardon. You know that I am no coward. In your present state it would be an easy matter to thrash you, but I cannot forget that you are the misguided brother of the woman I love—that you were once my friend!"

So saying, Hawley pressed a kiss on Minnie's cheek, and stepped swiftly out of the room, followed by the taunts of Edgar Alston.

While this unhappy scene was being enacted, Mr. Jabez Alston was walking home. This was a certain sign that his mind was greatly disturbed. If anything agitated or perplexed him seriously, he invariably walked to and from the office, no matter how inclement the weather, although his carriage was always within call.

As he was crossing Madison square Edward Hawley almost collided with him without noticing who it was.

"Pardon!" he murmured, and would have passed on had not the financier recognized him.

"Edward Hawley! My dear fellow, I have not seen you for weeks! Are you forgetting your old friends?" Mr. Ja-

bez Alston said. This was only one of his forms of diplomacy. He had little use for Edward Hawley now. It is doubtful if he would have seen him at all had he not remembered that he was Edgar's closest friend. In this capacity he might be useful still.

"You have not been to see us for weeks, my boy."

Hawley pressed his lips hard together for a moment, then replied, calmly:

"I have been to your house to-day—not fifteen minutes since, sir. You will hear of it!"

"No doubt—no doubt. Edgar is never tired of singing your praises. You have been with him to-day?" He glanced sharply at Hawley, and saw that there was something on his mind. "Do you object to walking a little way with me—that is, if you are not in a hurry?" Then seeing that the young man hesitated, he added: "I believe that it is in your power to render me a great service—if you will."

Hawley took the arm that was held toward him, saying:

"I must be candid with you, Mr. Alston; I owe it to you as much as I do to myself. I partly divine that you have discovered something of Edgar's latest infatuation, and imagine that I am capable of exercising some control over his actions—that he will listen to my advice."

"That is so," assented Jabez Alston.

"I am sorry, then, that I cannot help you in the way you wish."

"You encourage him?" was the hot retort.

"Wait, and I will explain. Yesterday your daughter sent for me to discuss this very question. At her desire I investigated the character of Isabel Russell as far as I could in so short a time, and she is nothing less than an adventuress—a harlot! A creature with the beauty of a goddess—a walking Venus!"

Jabez Alston groaned.

"Go on," he said.

"I visited Edgar at his club, at the request of Minnie, your daughter; I remonstrated with him only to be the recipient of a torrent of abuse. I wrote to Miss Alston at once, and told her of my non-success, adding that I would call upon her again to-day. I did so, and met Edgar in a state of drunken fury. Forgetful of his sister's presence, he used the vilest epithets toward me and even struck me."

Hawley turned his bruised cheek toward the financier, and the face of Jabez Alston hardened in a manner that was not good to see.

"The ingrate!" he muttered. "I could curse him! I will end this folly once and for all. This woman can be bought off, you think?"

Hawley shrugged his shoulders.

"If my informant is correct, she is capable of driving a hard bargain," he said. "It may be that she has conceived a passion for Edgar, but I doubt it."

"I am glad that you have been honest with me, my boy," the financier said, kindly. "I recognized your handwriting, and wondered why you should address my daughter; but I never doubted your honor. You know my desires. Lord St. Leonards has already asked her hand in marriage, and has my consent to woo and wed my dear child."

Hawley turned aside to hide the wave of color that rushed into his face.

"I know that it must be some sort of a disappointment to you," went on Jabez Alston. "I am not so dull that I have been blind to the fact that you young people have had many thoughts in common, but the ways of inexorable Fate are not always those we desire."

"Don't—don't!" interrupted Hawley. "I am a little more human than you fancy I am! I have not your flinty nature, sir!"

The financier started.

"I repeat it, sir. You must be without a heart yourself to talk in the way you do. I am not an eligible parti. I should perhaps not be eligible in your sight, even if my father had not been unfortunate; but I have told my love to Minnie, and with Heaven's help I will yet win a place in life worthy of her acceptance!"

Not a muscle of the financier's face gave evidence of the torrent of wrath, surprise, and disappointment raging within.

"Both Edgar and Minnie shall go to Europe at once!" flashed through his mind. "While I am adding to my wealth, I am allowing the dream of a life to verge upon being shipwrecked!"

He looked kindly into Hawley's flushed face.

"You have acted thoughtlessly," he said, "and knowing you as I do, I cannot be harsh or cruel. What you propose can never be. It must now be good-by!"

He held out his hand, but Edward Hawley did not see it.
"I shall never counsel Miss Alston to oppose the wishes
of her father," he replied, bitterly, "even though he has a

heart of stone; but I have hope. I have confidence that she will yet be my wife. I sympathize with you now that your ambitions threaten to fall about you like a house of cards, Mr. Alston, but you will have no one to blame but yourself!"

He turned and hurried away, and Jabez Alston stifled an oath upon his lips.

In the face of extreme danger he was as cool as an iceberg. His calm smile had inspired confidence in the hearts of his dupes when upon the verge of ruin, and now that he knew the worst, his expression became doubly serene.

"He says that I am heartless," he mused. "Perhaps I am. I have long discarded the passions which are supposed to be inherent in all that is human. Now let me analyze myself—let me suppose that Edgar is stubborn enough to cling to this—er—harlot—what shall I do? Curse him, and turn him penniless into the streets! I have no regard for anything which bars my way. But he will see with what he has to deal," his thin lips resolved themselves into a straight line, "and, as usual, will bow to my superior will. As for my daughter—— Pshaw, it is not worth arguing. She does as I command her to do!"

He passed up the noble flight of steps into his own splendid entrance hall, a smile upon his lips. He spoke pleasantly to one of the servants, and inquired for his daughter.

Miss Alston was in her boudoir, and Mr. Edgar was in the library. He decided to see his daughter first and went to her at once.

He kissed her brow calmly, saying:

"You have been crying, my dear. There! do not trouble to explain. I met young Hawley, and he told me all! As usual, Edgar has been making a fool of himself. I will see him now!"

"You will not be harsh, papa!" she pleaded. "We do not know how much he has been tempted!"

He smiled reassuringly.

"Am I ever harsh with him—or with you?" he demanded. "You would defend him to the last! I will adopt measures that will free him of this woman, and bring him to what senses he still possesses."

There was a bitter sneer in his tones.

"He is in the library, probably waiting for me. St. Leonards warned me of this, so that I am not unprepared. I am led to believe that he is pot-valiant! A man is never so weak as then. Do not interrupt us, my dear. Come down in half an hour and I trust that all will be well."

He went down to the library where his son was awaiting him in a half-defiant mood, and carefully closed the door behind him.

"Be seated, my boy," he said, serenely. "I have heard sufficient from Lord St. Leonards to be prepared for something which is painful to my feelings, as a careful father."

He pretended not to notice his son's flushed face and almost savage expression.

"Now don't interrupt me, please, as I wish to plunge right into this business. You fancy that you are in love with some lady——"

"It is no fancy!" blurted out Edgar. "I love her madly!

Death would be preferable to losing her."

"Well?"

"You see, I have quite made up my mind, sir. Nothing

can alter it. I am a man and ought to know my own mind.

No arguments on earth will move me one iota."

"I do not think that I have opposed you yet, Edgar," was the quiet reply. "St. Leonards speaks well of the lady, though I have little confidence in the rhapsodies of young men where a pretty woman is concerned. As for actresses—as a rule they are as worthless as they are painted! What do you want of me?"

"I want your consent and as much money as you can afford to give to me. I can't start housekeeping on nothing."

Jabez Alston laughed mirthlessly.

"What is her figure?" he remarked, carelessly, but with a sudden contraction of the eyelids.

"Her figure!" repeated Edgar, flushing hotly.

"What is the amount of the settlement she demands the marriage settlement?"

"Fifty thousand!" blurted out the young man. "A fleabite to you!"

Jabez Alston was silent for a few minutes, then he said:

"I must take time to consider this."

"I cannot wait," was the dogged rejoinder. "It must be yes or no."

"And if I say no?"

"Then I must shift for myself. I have been your plaything long enough. The richest man in New York keeps his son on a beggarly allowance—treats him as though he were a child—and——"

"The interview is ended," his father interrupted, coldly.
"I will not find you one penny for this woman who values
you personally at nothing. I do not wish you to leave my

house until you have had time to consider—until you have proved that this Isabel Russell is a scheming adventuress. I——''

"Hold!" thundered Edgar. "You shall not smirch her name! I may forget that you are my father. I am not so friendless as you believe!"

The elder man rose, and coldly pointed to the door.

"Go!" he said. "I have no wish to prolong this melodramatic scene! Go to your harlot, and discover, when it is too late, that she is not what your fancy has painted her. I have no wish to see you again until you confess that I have not erred in my judgment. When you have been cast off—scorched by the fire of her artifice—a scorned and pitiable thing, then you may return and I will forgive you."

"That will be never!" snarled Edgar, as he dashed out of the room with the noise of a whirlwind.

He ordered the valet to pack up his belongings forthwith, saying:

"I am going away to-night. I will let you know where to send them."

Then he sought his sister and begged of her to forgive him.

"I have been a brute," he groaned, "but it is not all my fault. You shall hear of me soon. I have plenty of good friends."

An hour later he left the house and shook his fist vengefully at the window of the room where he knew that his cold-hearted father was calmly enjoying his dinner.

"I will go to the Waldorf," he thought, "and send for my baggage. To-morrow I shall see St. Leonards and have that money matter fixed up. Within a week I hope to clasp Isabel to my heart as my wife."

Meanwhile the serenity of the flinty hearted financier was undisturbed.

"I will see this painted wanton," he thought. "St. Leonards shall take me to her. If fifty thousand will buy her, and send her to the antipodes it shall be done. Curse the women and their wiles! I cannot understand how men can be made fools of! Unless I am far out of my reckoning, we shall be in Europe within a month! I will send a telegram to St. Leonards to-night!"

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CHAPTER XI.

"THINK OF ISABEL!"

St. Leonards kept his appointment at the Athenian Club to the moment, and found Alston waiting for him with pale, anxious face, and blood-shot eyes.

"You are not looking well," his lordship observed, considerately. "You will have to take more care of yourself, Alston, bah Jove!"

"I have been going the pace too fast, but I shall settle down soon now," Edgar replied. "Truth is, old boy, I am thoroughly miserable. I behaved like a brute last night to my sister, but it was mainly on your account."

"Indeed!" exclaimed St. Leonards, trying to look interested.

"I found Hawley—the fellow who is sweet on Minnie—at home when I got there. Didn't expect to be disturbed, you know, and there was a regular row! Hawley is a scene-painter at the Frivolity. Used to be a friend of mine—an old college chum—but has come down in the world with a run. Stimson, the manager of the Frivolity, sent him with some cock-and-bull story about Miss Russell, to which I refused to listen."

St. Leonards' face grew dark.

"Miss Russell is a friend of mine, and as such I will protect her until she is your wife," he said.

"I can do all that sort of thing," Edgar interrupted.
"Much obliged to you, though, old fellow."

"Well, what luck with papa?" his lordship demanded.

He pretended the utmost anxiety, though he had not left Mr. Jabez Alston more than half an hour, from whom he had heard the story in detail.

"I am out in the cold," Edgar replied.

"Never! bah Jove!"

"Yes. The governor put on his tantalizing sneer, and after a wordy war, politely requested me to go until I came to my senses!"

"And he would do nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing. I defied him, relying upon your assistance, and he can go to the devil if he chooses," growled Alston. "He has a notion that I shall go whining back in a few days like a whipped cur. By Heaven, he is mistaken!"

"What did he say of Miss Russell?" asked St. Leonards.

"What didn't he say! By Heaven, sir, he called her a harlot! a wanton! a scheming adventuress, and a painted Jezebel! I can never forgive him—never! He shall beg Isabel's pardon on his knees!"

"He shall!" chimed in the peer, frowning. "I take this almost as a personal matter. But, then, you are his only son, and it is hard to have his cherished schemes thwarted. We must be charitable! Put yourself in his place. Depend upon it that it is pure affection that prompts him to act in this way."

Edgar looked at him sharply. He thought that he detected a little sarcasm in his lordship's tones, but the pale gray eyes were beaming benignly.

"I will make it the business of my life," he proceeded, "to bring you together—to heal up this breach. Family dissensions are the worst of troubles." "We will discuss this when my position is strength-ened," interrupted Alston; "when Isabel is my wife, and I can show him that I am independent. As for his affection, he has none, except for himself. Now, then, the next important step is to raise the money, as you suggested yesterday. I am practically in your hands, and I will be candid with you. Though the son of the reputed keenest financier in New York—a human steel trap I have heard him called—I am a baby in business matters."

"Yes—yes!" assented St. Leonards, indulgently.

"I have only had a paltry allowance, every penny of which I have spent, and, in addition, am up to my ears in debt."

"I quite understand that, dear boy. How much do you owe?"

"Oh, damn it! I haven't the faintest idea. Maybe twenty thousand; and there's that flat—the furniture, you know—and—and one or two other items."

The British peer looked horrified.

"Surely—surely," he said, "Miss Russell did not permit you to—er—incur the expense of—of——"

"I insisted upon it! Man! what do you take me for?"

"Then, bah Jove! it is a love match, and no mistake! I never knew Miss Russell to permit such a thing before!"

He looked so delighted that Alston flushed with gratification. It appeared that he had achieved that which others had sighed for in vain!

"Twenty thousand! Aw! a trifle for a fellow in your position. I owed three times as much when I was twenty! Beastly tradespeople, I suppose? Tailors, jewelers, and that class? No matter—owe it, dear boy—owe it! I sup-

pose you have not—er—had the need to borrow much money?"

"No! I had my allowance quarterly. Two thousand five hundred, and if I ever ran short, private friends accommodated me," Alston said, a little gloomily. "But, there! my credit is good enough!"

St. Leonards shrugged his shoulders, and a sneer played round his mouth.

"You'll get used to this sort of thing in the course of time, and it will be better for me to break the news to you than—er—a stranger."

"News! what news?" gasped Alston.

St. Leonards drew a copy of the New York World from his pocket and pointed to a paragraph which he had carefully marked.

It was headed:

"THE FINANCIER AND THE ACTRESS.

"THE SON OF A NEW YORK MILLIONAIRE WANTS TO MARRY A CHARMING DEMOISELLE WHO TRIPS IT BEFORE THE FOOTLIGHTS, BUT PAPA OBJECTS."

The horrible words danced before Edgar Alston's eyes like fiery demons. Then he perused the report, which read as follows:

"Romance with a vengeance! A millionaire's son prefers poverty with the girl he loves, to affluence without her. All true lovers will sympathize with him, and the stern father who has driven him from the paternal mansion will be likened to the horrible ogre in the fairy stories. But this is no fairy story, and bids to be one of the sensations of the day. We can only hint at present that the faithful lover has sought refuge at an uptown hotel, determined to wed the woman of his choice, but will endeavor to furnish our readers with full particulars in the next issue."

Alston sank into a seat, trembling and as pale as death. "My Heaven!" he gasped. "What does this mean?

How has it leaked out?"

"One never knows. These American reporters are the very duse! They respect no one, high or low. When I came here, my private life was raked up until I began to believe that I was the greatest scoundrel on earth. Then I allowed the devils to interview me, parted with a few dollars, and I became a saint. In England they would get two years at hard labor!"

Alston's head was buried in his hands.

"Do you think they will find me?" he groaned. "By Heaven! I'll shoot the first man who approaches me!"

"Nonsense—nonsense!" smiled the man who had been instrumental in causing the publication of the item. "Be a man—for Isabel's sake. We must come to business! I have brought a couple of blank notes. You had better fill them in for what you want—say eighty thousand dollars—two fortys—one at three and one at four months."

"Eighty thousand!" murmured Alton.

"Yes, dear boy. I am thinking of you solely. Fifty for your wife, and a little to begin life with besides. When you are safely married, I will try and reconcile your father to the inevitable. I shall have a double purpose in doing this, because if I fail I shall have to pay these notes, being the indorser."

"You are too good!"

"I will also endeavor to keep any further scandal out of the papers."

He handed the notes to the half-dazed Alston, saying:

"Fill them in as I have directed and name the bank at which they are to be payable."

Edgar obeyed, and after signing them, St. Leonards placed them carefully in his pocket-book.

"I will cable to my man of business in London," he said, "and do not doubt that I shall have the money for you to-morrow."

"And until then?" asked the dupe.

"Keep yourself to yourself. Do not drink too much, dear boy! For Isabel's sake. Remember that she is like a sister to me. In all this I am thinking of her as much as of you. You will see her this evening, of course! I should not venture to Park avenue until evening, for Isabel's sake. You know not who may be dogging your steps. I understand that the unscrupulous publishers of newspapers in New York employ detectives for the purpose of gathering news for their nefarious traffic."

Edgar Alston remembered Nathaniel Hawkley, and an oath escaped him.

"You are right," he said. "A fellow named Hawkley has been on my track for days!"

"Hawkley!" faltered St. Leonards. "Aw—I don't know him," he added, with a sickly smile.

"He was here yesterday, and asked me if you were Lord St. Leonards."

"Here!" His lordship looked white. "Bah Jove! I shall be connected with this affair next. In future we will meet at the Waldorf. Well, ta-ta! If anything transpires favorably, I will look you up to-night between nine and ten in Park avenue, if I may be permitted."

They shook hands, and St. Leonards went away and was

driven to Isabel's residence in a cab. Having ascertained that he was not being followed, his lordship ran up stairs. He hoped to escape the watchful eye of the janitor. The door of Isabel Russell's apartments was promptly opened to him, and he was ushered in by Lucy.

The siren and Roseberry were evidently expecting him, and when the key had been turned in the door, he gleefully exhibited the notes which had been handed to him by Edgar Alston to get discounted.

"The first installment," he said, "and the poor fool will be here to-night. You understand?"

He looked meaningly at Isabel. She nodded.

"There must be no mistake, and we break camp to-morrow."

"So soon!"

"Hawkley!" he whispered.

Gilbert Roseberry started up with a savage oath.

"You are safe!" the false St. Leonards hastened to say.

"It is I who am in most danger now. Hawkley suspects something. I shall be here at ten to-night, and in the meanwhile another nest will be provided. I will see to that. The old man will visit you in secret to offer you money to give up his son. Play your cards discreefly—and——"

Isabel interrupted him with a peal of rippling laughter.

"I understand. Old men are greater fools than young ones."

"This is no ordinary man."

"So much the better. Variety is charming!"

Roseberry frowned darkly, and muttered:

"I shall be glad when all this is ended."

"And so shall I, old friend, with a fortune and rolling on the bounding seas!"

Then turning to Isabel, he said:

"To-night at ten. Do your part, and I will do mine. To-morrow we quit here, and I will sell this stuff as it stands to the highest bidder. It ought to fetch fifteen hundred."

He went away quietly, Lucy having been sent to hold the janitor in conversation in the regions below. Ten minutes later there was another ring at the bell, and Lucy appeared with a card bearing the name of "John Stimson."

"So he has found me!" muttered Isabel, a wild, hunted look coming into her eyes. "Gilbert, leave me alone with this man. It is Stimson, from the Frivolity."

Roseberry obeyed, and John Stimson was admitted into the lady's bower, an ugly smile on his face.

"What do you want here?" she demanded. "Cannot I rest in peace anywhere?"

"Not unless you employ yourself honestly," he retorted.
"I am up to every move you make. You shall not ruin the young fool who is scorching himself in the fire of your devilish wiles."

"What business is it of yours?"

"I thought that I loved you once, Isabel Russell, and believed myself——".

Principal of police

"Hush!" she whispered, in agony.

"Oh, there is no one to hear! I half credited the story that you had married again, but I have had you watched constantly. Now, listen! I have no time to waste here. You must quit New York. You must set young Alston free. He'll soon get over it."

"And if I refuse?"

"I'll have you arrested, you she-devil. You know what for!"

"Hush! A woman cannot cope with a man. I will go!"
He looked at her fiercely.

"None of your tricks!"

"I tell you that I will go!" she hissed. "I will go within forty-eight hours. You shall never hear of me again. I only came to you when I was starving."

"You thought that the old power would bring me to your feet again," he sneered. "I obtained an engagement for you, and hoped that you were satisfied. Let this poor dupe go, or I will hunt you down. You know that I am not to be fooled with again. I hate you!"

She looked at him with a bitter smile.

"Good-day!" he added. "I shall be here in two day's time. In the meantime I shall keep my eyes open!"

He went out after casting upon her a malevolent glance, and when she heard his footsteps dying away on the stairs, she paced the room like a tragedy queen.

"How am I to escape him?" she murmured. "My Heaven, is he to ruin all? No! If Gilbert did but know, he would kill me!"

The remainder of the day was one of torture to her. A hundred plans were made and discarded, but at last came a settled determination in her eyes, and they gleamed with the fires of deadly hate.

How would she be able to play her part? How could she bear the caresses of Edgar Alston?

At seven o'clock he was there, breathing all the madness in her ears that she had heard so often before. He

had left home—friends—all for her sake! In a few hours he would cast riches into her lap. He kissed her until he was intoxicated—he clung to her under the spell of her devilish witchery—the magic of her touch—the glances of her eyes.

He drank to her beauty, the nectar prepared by her lilywhite fingers, and heard with remorse of her trials for his sake.

"We must go away soon, Edgar," she told him, half tearfully. "I believe that we are being watched—that your father has set a spy upon me. Oh, the degradation of it!"

"The accursed newspaper report," he thought, vengefully.

"And I dread—you cannot think how much—of dragging your dear name through the mire of scandal. You had better let me go—and—and forget me!"

"Isabel!"

The pathos in his tones startled her.

"I would die a hundred deaths in preference! Father, home, and friends are nothing now!"

He was bewildered by the force of his feelings—by his anxiety to rescue this woman from the trouble with which he believed that he had surrounded her—and his senses reeled with the opium-flavored wine that he had been drinking.

Oh, how eagerly he looked now for the coming of St. Leonards.

"I may have the money to-night," he told her many times. "A trusted friend is busy in my behalf—a friend of yours also—Lord St. Leonards!" At ten his lordship appeared as softly as a shadow, and when he saw Alston's condition he smiled grimly.

"I wish to see you alone a moment, Alston," he said, quietly.

"No—no! We have no secrets here, old fellow. I have told Isabel all."

"Well, come to the table."

Alston staggered across the room, looking eagerly into St. Leonards' face.

"The money!" he gasped.

"That is what I wish to talk about. Be seated, dear boy."

"The money!" said Edgar, hoarsely.

"My man of business is away! His clerk has sent a cable to that effect. He will not be home for a week."

"Heavens!"

"Don't take on so! I went at once to a money lender—a broker—and he is willing to advance the money. You see how I have been working for you!"

"You are my savior!"

"One moment. I have filled in two other notes—same date and same amount as the others—but they must bear the signature of your father's firm!"

"Forgery," murmured Edgar.

"Nonsense! Money must be raised. Think of Isabel! See the risk I run. It is not forgery in its literal meaning, because I am a party to it; and remember that I am a peer of the British realm! Think of poor Isabel. In twenty-four hours this place will swarm with your creditors unless you satisfy them in some way. You signed checks and notes a year ago while your father was ill with

rheumatism. You can do so still. For the woman I professed to love I——"

"Give me a pen!" interrupted Alston, fiercely. "I care for nothing!"

He hastily scrawled "Jabez Alston & Co.," at the foot of the notes, and saw them quietly pocketed by St. Leonards.

"Now you must not be impatient," he said. "It may take me a day or two to negotiate these things, but I will do it!"

A significant glance passed between him and the siren, and he whispered:

"We quit at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Imperative! I have all prepared."

He went away, and Alston sank onto a divan by the side of Isabel. He caressed her in a maudlin fashion, and with gentle fingers she pressed more wine upon him.

His last vision of her was that of a beautiful, smiling devil! Then he sank into a deep slumber and dreamed blissful dreams.

It was long past midnight when he came to his senses, and the enchantress was lying half asleep in a cushioned chair.

"Edgar," she whispered, "it is time that you left me. People will talk."

"One last kiss! Heavens! how my brain reels! The excitement is too much for me. It is marvelous how you bear up through it all. To-morrow, sweetest another time of such bliss as this!"

He fondled her until she was tired, and as she gently pushed him away, he saw a spot of blood on her snowy white arm.

It seemed to dance and glow like lurid fire. He never forgot it.

Even in the cab that whirled him back to the Waldorf, it danced before his eyes—all through his sleepless night—and flashed over the broad sheets of the morning paper, until it rested upon a thrilling account of the murder of John Stimson, the manager of the Frivolity!

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BOOK THREE.

HER LAST VICTIM.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE NOTES WERE MADE BY ME!"

Mr. Jabez Alston, the financier, was not often outwardly disturbed, but the more he reflected upon the peril of his son, the more grave his face became. He could bear the loss of a million without emotion. That could be recovered; but the loss of his only son was an unforeseen calamity—a loss which might be irreparable unless prompt action were taken.

"Headstrong fool!" he muttered. "He never was possessed of an ounce of ballast! Curse this Queenie, or whatever else she may be called! Some painted hussy who has used her wiles to good advantage. Not a word from him! Things cannot go on in this way. I will see her this very day—give her money to release him, and I should imagine that the lesson will give him a life cure!"

He took a card from his vest pocket containing the address of Isabel Russell. This had been provided by Lord St. Leonards, whose anxiety on behalf of the misguided Edgar was almost touching.

"Eight o'clock this evening," he muttered, with a frown.

"Most inconvenient hour, but personal considerations are out of the question now!"

He was very taciturn at the breakfast-table, and Minnie would have been wretched, indeed, but for a brave letter from her lover which she had received the previous day.

"I will save Edgar from this bad woman," Edward Hawley wrote. "I cannot forget that he has been my friend, and that he is your brother. Be brave, my darling, and all will come right at last!"

She had read the sweet words so many times that she knew them by heart, and was repeating the fond assurances to herself, when her father spoke, interrogatively:

"I have not seen Lord St. Leonards for two days?"

"Have you not, papa?" Minnie replied, naively.

"Has he been here?" he demanded.

"He came yesterday, but I did not see him."

Her eyes sparkled, and a warm flush mounted to her cheeks.

"You mean that you would not see him!" he cried, angrily. "You think that I am to be openly defied!"

"I do not like Lord St. Leonards, papa," was the simple reply. "As a lover he is simply detestable!"

Jabez Alston left the table abruptly, harsh words half stifled on his lips, rage and determination in his heart.

He sprang into the waiting coupe and was driven to his office. For the first time in twenty years he forgot to say good-morning to his confidential clerk, and passed into his private room, a thunder-cloud upon his brow.

He laid aside hat, ulster, and gloves, and was scarcely seated at his desk, when his confidential man appeared, strong anxiety expressed in his face.

"What is it, Billings?" he demanded.

"A serious matter, sir, I am afraid. A Jew money lender has been waiting to see you for an hour or more."

"I have nothing to do with those people," interrupted the millionaire, impatiently.

"But he holds two notes for a large amount which appear to bear your signature."

Jabez Alston's face turned deathly white.

"I have not signed a note for ten years," he gurgled.

"Of course not, sir. I have looked at the writing, and it is not even a good imitation."

"Do you suspect any one, Billings?" his employer asked, huskily. "Speak out. I trust you in all things, even the honor of my name!"

"It is Mr. Edgar's handwriting, sir," Billings said, his pale face growing paler still. "I knew it in a moment. A trifle shaky, but there is no mistaking it."

"Good God! Just as I suspected!" The proud financier bent down his head to his desk and groaned. Then he looked up quickly, adding: "Show the fellow in. My son must be saved, at any cost; but I will never forgive him for this. Forgery! It is equal to murder! The lever I now hold may bring him to his senses. Mr. Billings, I have not told you of my trouble—of my son's mad folly——"

"I have heard something of it, sir," the clerk said, deprecatingly. "And if I can help you to save the house from scandal, you have but to command me."

"Show the Jew in," Mr. Alston said. "There may be some conspiracy here. After I have probed him, Billings, we will discuss the matter."

The confidential clerk retired, and a minute later a son

of Israel entered the room with a bow and a smile. His foxy black eyes rested for a moment on the stern features of the financier, then he buried his hooked nose in a dirty pocket-handkerchief, snuffling:

"Good-morning, sir."

"Close the door and be seated," Mr. Alston said, briefly.

The Jew obeyed, his restless eyes furtively watching the financier's inscrutable face. He took a position on the extreme edge of a chair, his features still wreathed in smiles.

"My name is Solomon," he began, in oily tones. "Sorry to trouble you, sir, but it is a matter of trifling importance if the paper I hold is right."

"Go on."

"Well, Mr. Alston, I have discounted two notes for thirty thousand each, purporting to be made by you."

The financier nodded.

"For whom were they discounted?"

"A British nobleman whose indorsement they bear— Lord St. Leonards."

Mr. Alston started.

"I don't know why I became suspicious that all was not right," continued the Jew, "but I decided to show the notes to your bankers, and was advised to see you without delay. This frightened me, because I cannot afford to lose so much money. If they an't straight goods, I'll send the forger to Sing Sing for a spell, s' help me, Moses!"

He assumed a wicked scowl, and excitedly rose to his feet and paced the floor.

"Let me see the notes," Mr. Alston said, calmly.

For a minute the Jew glared at him suspiciously; then

he took a greasy wallet from an inner pocket, from which he produced one of the fatal notes, being careful not to let it escape his hawk-like claws.

"That is one of them," he snarled. "That is one of the notes by which I have been swindled. I'll hunt the forger to his very death!"

Astute as Mr. Jabez Alston was, it never occurred to him that the Jew was playing a part. It never occurred to him that he was the dupe of a deep-laid scheme.

"I am bewildered," he thought. "What can St. Leonards have had to do with this?" He glanced at the moneylender, adding: "The fiend will go to any length!"

"Mr. Solomon," he said, icily, "I fail to see how you have been swindled. It appears to me that this is an ordinary business transaction."

The Jew's eyes glittered with a sudden fire of avarice and triumph.

"You acknowledge the notes!" he gasped. "Your bankers feared they were forgeries, and I notified the police to await my instructions. I am sorry I did this."

Mr. Alston made a gesture of annoyance.

"I will redeem them now," he said. "The notes were made by me!"

He unlocked a drawer in his desk, and took therefrom a check-book. A placid smile overspread his face, and with a firm hand he wrote a check for sixty thousand dollars, the full amount of the two notes.

One minute, and the check and notes had changed hands. Mr. Solomon was bowed out, and when he was alone the financier uttered a deep groan.

"My son a forger!" he muttered. "At last he has de-

scended to this, and for the sake of that accursed woman! Why should I not discard him? Oh, God! to think that my name—the honor of my house should be in his keeping!"

He sat down, and for a little while gazed steadily at the window that overlooked the busy street below.

Five—ten minutes elapsed; then there was a languid step in the outer office, and the well-known voice of St. Leonards was asking for Alston.

The millionaire stepped quickly to the door and opened it.

"Good-morning, my lord," he said. "Come in—come in!"

"Ah—how d'ye do, Alston?" St. Leonards replied. "Bah Jove, you are not well," he added, in sudden alarm.

"I am quite well," with a hollow laugh. "Only a trifle upset."

"Ah, yes—of course. I understand," his lordship said, sadly. "I have done my best for the boy, but I am afraid that he will marry her. I helped him to cash your notes—he told me that you had washed your hands of him, and that was his portion of your wealth. With the proceeds he is willing to go abroad and take Isabel Russell with him; but if I judge her character aright she will hardly be satisfied with a few thousands from the son of New York's greatest millionaire!"

A sickly smile overspread the financier's gray face, as he whispered:

"It was kind of you to back those notes, St. Leonards."

"Yes, I'did it so that he would get their full commercial value. I took them to a fellow who is a few degrees better

than the ordinary human shark. He knew me years ago before I attained my majority, and my name put aside any doubts he may have had if the papers had been offered to him by Edgar alone."

"And you never had any suspicion about those notes, St. Leonards?"

"Suspicion?"

His lordship laughed good-humoredly.

"I don't think the name of Jabez Alston is likely to be questioned for so paltry a sum!" he said. "And I don't think that I shall ever be called upon to pay dishonored notes bearing your signature."

"St. Leonards," the millionaire replied, hoarsely, "you must know little of business matters to dream for one moment that I would attach my name to those wretched things."

His lordship leaned forward, a look of horror on his face.

"Do you mean to tell me that they are——"
He hesitated, and Jabez Alston added:

"Forgeries! Yes, St. Leonards, my only son has descended to this! I say it with shame. This Jew, this Solomon, has been here—I have taken up the accursed paper. It is safely hidden in my safe. Now to save him from this hellish woman! If he cannot satisfy her he will resort to his penmanship again. He is enthralled!"

"Heavens! how horrible!" his lordship murmured.
"My dear Alston, I am positive that she cares nothing for Edgar. She dislikes very young men—I know it. Like all of her class, she worships money and what money will buy. She will fool him to the top of his bent, despising

him all the while. Bad as she is, I do not think that she is capable of inducing him to commit a crime for her sake. Yes, he must be saved from her—and from—himself! If you saw her and pleaded with her——"

"I will!"

Jabez Alston brought his fist down with a thunderous bang on the table.

"I will! and this very night!"

"What time shall you leave the office?" asked St. Leonards, after a minute's silence.

"Four o'clock. I will telephone to the house for an early dinner. May I hope that you will join me, St. Leonards? After what has passed I must regard you in the light of one of my closest friends."

"You do me honor, sir," his lordship replied. "As I aspire to become a member of your family, it is only natural that the interests of that family are even dearer to me than my own."

The two men clasped hands and there were tears in the eyes of the millionaire.

"You British," he replied, huskily, "are supposed to prize honor before all else, but though my whole life has been devoted to dollars and dimes, I believe that a foul blot on my name would kill me. My lord, you speak of the possibility of becoming a member of my family, and I may suggest that you visit us more frequently. There is nothing between your suit but a childish infatuation which will wear away when my daughter begins to realize your true worth."

St. Leonards turned aside his head for a moment, then replied, sympathetically:

"I have given my whole heart to Miss Alston, but I am not a bold wooer. Loving her as I do, I would give way to any one more favored who is worthy of so priceless a jewel. Until this morning I was not hopeful, and though it is against my nature to find pleasure in profiting by the misfortunes of another, I cannot help but rejoice that your daughter has been saved from what might have been a sad fate had I ultimately been discarded for Mr. Edward Hawley."

Mr. Alston looked at him questioningly.

"Ah, I see that you have not heard the sad news. You have been too full of your own troubles to heed those of others. Edward Hawley has been arrested this morning, charged with the murder of Stimson, the manager at the Frivolity."

"Great God! No!"

"It is only too true. He and Stimson quarreled violently a few hours before the murder. Hawley has neglected his work of late, and caused dissatisfaction to the management. You must not forget that it was he who brought Edgar and Isabel Russell together, and though it is cowardly to speak ill of any man behind his back, I believe that he has all along been playing a double game for the purpose of being in constant communication with your daughter."

Jabez Alston was shocked by the news; but when a man becomes poor, he argued, there is no knowing to what lower depths he may sink.

"In one way I am relieved," he said, "but I cannot help feeling sorry that one who once held my respect and esteem should have proved himself never to have been worthy of either. Is there no reasonable doubt that he is innocent—that there is a mistake somewhere?"

St. Leonards shrugged his shoulders.

"The revolver that killed Stimson was found under some rubbish in his painting room," he said. "Everything points to his guilt. I have just read of the affair in the morning papers."

"An accident," the financier murmured. "I cannot believe that it was otherwise unless, indeed, the boy has gone altogether to the bad. Pshaw! This effectually ends all between us."

"I will look in about four," St. Leonards observed, "and you can take me home in your carriage."

"Very well. And to-night I will see this Isabel Russell. I have no doubt that money will tempt her to let my poor boy go—to open his eyes to his insane folly."

"You will be successful, though I am pretty sure, from all accounts, that the actress woman will drive a hard bargain. I will be on hand in good time."

He left Jabez Alston, and stepped into a waiting cab, his order to the driver being:

"To the Esmeralda Flats, Park avenue."

As the vehicle rattled away, he took up a copy of that day's Herald from among other morning papers which he had purchased and left on the seat. His eyes wandered to the shipping news., and a strange smile flickered over his face when he saw the following:

"Sydney, Australia—arrived, steamship Concordia."

A list of the first saloon passengers was appended, the foremost of whom was Lord St. Leonards and party.

The bogus nobleman smiled, but there were anxious lines about his mouth.

"Another twenty-four hours should see the business in New York at an end," he muttered. "If I were suspected what would be easier than a cable to Australia? I will see Isabel at once. She can squeeze twenty thousand out of Alston, and then we sha'n't be so badly off after all. I am pretty safe, I think, for Roseberry dare not stir with the fear of the State prison of Frankfort before him."

A savage smile distorted his face, and he continued:

"Oh! how I love her, and he alone stands between us! Another week and we will be on the high seas, and as for him, he dies!"

The cab stopped at Isabel's residence, and here St. Leonards dismissed it.

Running lightly up stairs, he was admitted into the siren's presence by a prearranged signal.

"Where is Gilbert?" he demanded. "All this is to be fair and above-board. No secrets. We sink or swim together!"

"I am here," announced the deep voice of Roseberry, as he parted the rich velvet curtains which divided the two rooms.

He drew a chair near to the divan upon which the lovely Isabel was reclining, attired in a morning gown of pale pink silk—a gift of Edgar Alston.

"Who talks of sinking?" the siren said, a little contemptuously. "You have discounted the notes, Mitford?" "Yes."

The false St. Leonards drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a huge wad of bills, and tossed them into Isabel's lap, saying:

"The whole scheme worked like a charm. The beast of a Jew, however, exacted his price, but I could not afford to grumble. He ran certain risks, but has already received full value for the papers young Alston signed. The old man is coming here to-night, and you can get fifteen or twenty thousand out of him, if you follow my advice."

Isabel's eyes flashed.

"I do not require it," she sneered.

"You have others to consider besides yourself," he reminded her, and Roseberry nodded his approval. "The Concordia has arrived at Sydney. I don't want to finish up in prison. My liberty is very dear to me, particularly now that we have the wherewithal to enjoy life. If you choose you can settle with Jabez Alston to-night. Within a week we should be a thousand miles out at sea."

Isabel reflected a moment.

"I will resolve upon my course of action after I have met Mr. Jabez Alston, the flinty-hearted millionaire."

She laughed mirthlessly, her white teeth gleaming like pearls.

"I am not satisfied to let my prey escape me too easily. Money soon melts away, and it may be long before another such chance as this comes in my way. If you are afraid, Mitford Palmer, take your share of this and go!"

"Never!" he hissed. "Not without you."

Gilbert Roseberry turned upon him a glance full of jealous hatred, and Palmer continued:

"No, I claim an equal share in the whole of this business, and will not be shaken off like that. We shall be safer together! If you please, we will divide the present funds."

For a few minutes no word was spoken, and while Palmer carefully placed his share of the money in his pocket-book, Isabel lovingly caressed the pile of bills in her lap.

"Now what of young Alston?" Palmer at last demanded.

"I have done with him," smiled Isabel. "I shall see him no more. To-morrow we leave here, and the furniture must be disposed of to the highest bidder. I am very sorry to part with all these lovely things, but they are of no further use to me. I must leave the disposal of them in your able hands, Mitford. As I have said before, my plans will not be formed until I have met Mr. Jabez Alston. The young fool must be avoided at any cost. He is just at that age when revolvers come very awkwardly into play."

Her lip curled contemptuously.

"I will see you both early to-morrow," Palmer said, reaching for his gloves. "And if you have any influence over your wife, Roseberry, try and induce her to see the red lights ahead."

The convict scowled, while Isabel flashed a mocking glance toward the false St. Leonards.

"By the way," he added, "your friend Stimson will trouble you no more, Isabel; he is dead."

"I have read an account of his murder," she replied, coolly, "and the news was most agreeable. The only person I pity is the poor scene-painter."

"And he has been no friend of yours of late," Palmer observed, significantly. "You have your own luck and the devil's, too."

"Yes, and I need a few of fortune's favors," she smiled serenely. "It is a long lane that has no turning, Mitford.

To-morrow I shall expect you, though I guess that you will know from the millionaire what kind of reception he meets with at my hands."

As he rose she kissed the tips of her fingers to him, and he left the room, his heart filled with love and fury.

"The beautiful she-devil!" he muttered. "I half believe that she cares for me, only this infernal husband of hers is in the way. By the living God, there shall be an end to this soon! I will go to my club for a couple of hours. I must think—I must think!"

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CHAPTER XIII.

EDWARD HAWLEY'S TROUBLE.

It was true that Edward Hawley, the scene-painter at the Frivolity Theater, had been arrested on suspicion of having caused the death of the manager by shooting him with a revolver.

No one was more surprised than Hawley himself. The police waited upon him at home at an early hour, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he kept the awful news from his mother.

"It is outrageous!" he said, indignantly. "Poor Stimson! I did not even know that he was dead. I left him at three o'clock yesterday afternoon, and have not been to the theater since."

There were two officers, and the spokesman interjected:
"You quarreled with him?"

"Yes. I admit that. I have neglected my work lately, and he fancied that my time was being spent in the pursuit of a worthless woman. It did not suit me to contradict this, and we had a few words, that is all. I have not seen him since, and I can prove an alibi."

"That's all right, then," the policeman replied, cheerfully. "You don't want any fuss here, do you?"

"Not for worlds! I will say good-by to my mother and go with you."

He displayed a ten-dollar bill which effectually put a

bar to any objection on the part of the guardians of the law.

In five minutes he was in a hack and being driven with the policemen to the Tombs, where he learned with considerable astonishment that things looked very black against him. He had been seen within a stone's throw of the Frivolity shortly after midnight, and the revolver which had killed Stimson had been found in his workroom.

Conscious of his innocence, he felt certain of speedy release and sent for the lawyer who had conducted the affairs of his family in the days of their prosperity.

An application for his release on bail was refused by the presiding judge until after the inquest, at all events, and Hawley realized completely how friendless a man becomes when riches have deserted him.

His first visitor was Edgar Alston, who, on learning of the deep trouble of his old chum, manfully ignored the serious quarrel they had had at their last meeting, and called on him with the desire of making amends by befriending him. After an ample apology for his harsh treatment of Hawley, he said:

"How came this about, Ned? I have only just heard of it. Oh! it is terrible to see you behind these bars, and upon such a charge!"

"It is bad enough," admitted Hawley, with a wintry sort of smile, "but I shall not be here long! I would not care but for my mother, and——"

He hesitated, and Edgar added:

"And my sister, Minnie!"

"It is kind of you to come to see me, old man. I began

to think that I hadn't a friend left. You will take a message to my mother for me?"

"Need you ask?"

Edgar paced up and down opposite his friend's cell for a minute, then went on:

"And my father shall find the amount of your bail. I never intended speaking to him again, but for this I would face the devil himself. You understand that we have parted forever?"

"I have heard something of it. Edgar you are mad! I know the resolves you have made, but I beg of you to keep free of any further entanglement with that woman for a short time——"

"Hold! Not one word about her! If she were a daughter of the arch-fiend I should love her the same! When you are free we sail for Europe. I will not leave you with this hanging over you. You will prove an alibi?"

"Undoubtedly. I was seen near the theater at the hour of the murder, but I had a companion, who is aiding my counsel to make a strong defense."

"Have you any suspicion as to the perpetrator of the crime? It appears to me to be shrouded in mystery."

"I know who did it," Hawley replied, "but I cannot prove it yet."

He glanced sharply at his friend.

"A man?" Edgar asked.

"No, a woman! I am as positive as though I had seen the murder done."

Alston smiled cynically.

"Some poor creature whom the fellow had wronged?" he said.

"No, a woman who had wronged him—a woman with the form of an angel and the heart of a devil—a woman who had wronged him, and whose infamous career he had threatened to cut short!"

Alston paled. He would not admit that he understood, but his heart quivered with fear.

"Pshaw!" he said. "A mere theory! Who is she? What is her name?"

"Isabel Russell!"

Edgar laughed, then a savage oath escaped him.

"I am here to help to save you. You shall not make this charge against her! Let me prove to you that you are wrong. The murder was done shortly after midnight. I was with her the whole of the time. I did not leave until the next morning. I will swear to this! If you hope to shield yourself by making this charge against her, I will not stand by you!"

Then he remembered the crimson stain that he had seen on her dress, after his heavy sleep, and reeled against the wall. But no—no! it could not be! A thousand times no! Her spells were still upon him!

"We will not speak of the matter now," Hawley said, after a minute's silence. "It is in capable hands, and at an early day all will be proved. You may yet be ready to acknowledge that part of the night was a blank to you, Edgar. To-morrow I shall be free!"

Alston pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. He was between two fires.

"She is not guilty of this," were the thoughts that surged through his brain. "If she is, it was an accident. Nothing can change my love for her!" Still his heart was fired with many doubts. He knew that he had been guilty of some great indiscretion for her sake, but St. Leonards had counseled it, and St. Leonards was his friend. He had but a hazy notion of what it all meant. A large sum of money had to be raised to satisfy the cravings of Isabel. St. Leonards had the matter in hand, and Alston was debarred the society of his siren until the gold could be showered upon her. It might be one or two days, and he chafed under the delay. He had given his word of honor that he would await Lord St. Leonards' instructions.

"I will call upon your mother immediately, Ned," he suddenly exclaimed, "but I do not think that I dare face my father. I will write to him. He is bound to find the amount that your bail is fixed at, no matter what it may be. I will also send a letter to Minnie, if that will be any consolation to you, though I am afraid that you are wasting your love upon a girl who is certain to become Lady St. Leonards."

"Can it be, old chum, that you favor the suit of this titled Briton?" Hawley asked, in tones of reproach.

"By no means; but what can a girl do in opposition to her father's determination? I am forced to speak well of St. Leonards because he has proved himself my friend. I shall now leave no stone unturned to help you, Ned; indeed, it is a relief to have something to do to kill time—to keep me from dwelling upon the misery of being inactive. It may be the last I can do for you in this life. Nothing on earth can part me from Isabel, and as we cannot live here untouched by scandal, we will go abroad."

"I shall see you again?" asked Hawley, feverishly. "Tell my mother that it is all a mistake."

Edgar Alston went away, and hired a cab to take him to his friend's home in Twenty-third street.

A glance at Mrs. Hawley's face told him that she knew nothing of her son's trouble; and he broke the news to her as gently as possible.

"At the latest he will be home to-morrow," he said. "It is one of those peculiar cases when people are arrested right and left on mere suspicion."

He went so far as to declare that the whole of the members of the Frivolity company were temporarily locked up!

From Twenty-third street he went to his club, and after thinking for an hour decided to see his father and sister in person.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he ascended the steps of the home he had so recently left, and he stalked straight into one of the reception-rooms, instructing a servant to send his sister to him.

"Is my father at home?" he demanded.

He was informed that Mr. Alston had gone out an hour earlier, with Lord St. Leonards, and hardly knew whether to feel glad or sorry.

"Oh, Edgar I am so glad that you are back again," Minnie said, half tearfully. "I am miserable—utterly miserable now."

She had closed the door behind her, and he turned away abashed. The very purity of her presence was painful in contrast with the woman for whom he felt capable of committing any sin.

"I have not come to stay, Minnie," he replied. "I am here on behalf of my old chum, Edward Hawley."

"Bless you for that, Edgar!"

"I have just left him. Of course he has done no wrong, and I intended facing my father. He must find bail."

"He will do nothing," sobbed Minnie. "I have appealed to him vainly."

"And St. Leonards?"

"I hate him!" she said, vehemently.

"I will look him up. He will do much for me," Edgar replied. "Still, I have other friends."

He looked gloomily out into the street, until he felt his sister's hands laid appealingly on his arm.

"And what of yourself?" she questioned. "Do you know how miserable you have made me?"

"That is your own fault, Minnie; you object to the woman of my choice. You open your ears to all that is wicked concerning her. It is unfair to me and to her."

"But I have heard so much!"

"That is just the mischief of it. It is this infernal talk, talk, talk that causes trouble. I shall marry Isabel Russell, and some day you may condescend to acknowledge her."

He did not believe so in his heart, and yet his soul was steeped in the delirium of the siren's wiles!

"You are wondering what I shall do for money," he went on. "You are wondering how we shall live; but I am not the helpless fool you imagine me. With St. Leonards' help I shall receive a large sum within a few hours. My name is still good on paper, thanks to my father's reputation!"

He laughed harshly, then stopped quickly, for his sister's face was as pale as death.

"Your name on paper," she whispered, "but no one else's, Edgar!"

"I am not likely to put myself into a striped suit," he sneered. "A pretty opinion you have formed of me, evidently! I suppose these are some of my benevolent papa's predictions?"

He glared savagely at Minnie, and she replied, quickly:

"Then I was mistaken—I misunderstood papa. When I appealed to him to help Edward, he turned upon me with a ferocity that I have never seen before. He cursed you—he cursed me! He said that you had stooped so low as forgery—that you had forged his name to many—many thousands——"

"Heavens! No!"

The perspiration of an awful fear had gathered thickly on his brow. He remembered writing something, but had placed absolute confidence in Lord St. Leonards. He remembered Isabel's pleading eyes, and his own helplessness!

"Go on," he gasped. "Tell me all that he said."

"He had redeemed the forgeries to save you from prison—to save the name from disgrace! I do not understand it altogether—he was so inflamed with anger."

Edgar dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"There is some truth in it, Minnie," he said, at length, "but I am under the impression that I only wrote my own name, and that St. Leonards indorsed the notes. At any rate, what I did was by his advice. It shall all be cleared up!"

There was an awful suspicion in his mind now.

"If I have been fooled with," he muttered," I shall find it in my heart to shoot somebody dead!"

His mind was instantly made up. He would ignore the promises he had made to St. Leonards and Isabel. He resolved to visit his temptress at once, and know exactly what had occurred on the previous night.

"I have lavished the whole wealth of my affection upon her," he thought. "Every dollar of which I am possessed —even my honor! I have insulted my dearest friends—scorned the fond love of my sister, and forged my father's name! And yet, I cannot give her up—I cannot hate her —even if she prove as false as Delilah of old. No—no! I cannot believe it—I will not believe it!"

He paced the room for a little while, Minnie watching every movement—every expression with anxious interest.

"You shall be satisfied that all is right, little sister," he said, at last. "St. Leonards would not lend himself to anything wrong. A British peer!"—he sneered a little—"a British peer! He knows more of this affair than I do. I will see him at the earliest possible moment. To-morrow, Hawley must be set free! He has friends, and so have I. No further appeal shall be made to my father. If I have committed any great crime, let him look to St. Leonards, his own particular friend. I will come again to-morrow evening, Minnie, and may bring Edward with me. Be sure that I shall not leave New York without acquainting you with my intentions!"

He could scarcely repress the sob that rose in his throat, and left the house hurriedly.

As he paused in the portico to button his overcoat, he

was surprised to see the well-known figure of Detective Nathaniel Hawkley on the opposite side of the street.

"He is watching for me!" muttered Alston, the hot blood surging into his head. "Perhaps the old man has put him on! Oh, I am beset with troubles! I am up to my ears in debt, besides—all for her!"

He hurried away, but was soon aware that the detective was close upon his heels, and he wheeled round savagely, snarling:

"Why are you following me?"

"Oh, don't put yourself out, sir," was the suave rejoinder. "I must have a few words with you at your club or anywhere in private. A matter of life and death. I shall be of some service yet to you, Mr. Alston!"

"Curse you! Call a cab, or wait until one passes, and we will drive to the Athenian. If I go through the streets with you people will likely imagine that I am under arrest!"

He laughed bitterly.

"I've a carriage two blocks away," replied the detective. "You are not under arrest yet, but you've been sailing close to the wind, my young friend. See here, Mr. Edgar Alston! I've always had your interests at heart, though you have pretended not to believe me. Don't forget our introduction at Covington!"

"I never shall! I have all along regarded you as a meddlesome fool!"

"Time will show!" was the sententious rejoinder. "I've a big case on my hands, and my reputation is at stake!"

"Running down the poor fellow who escaped from the Frankfort State prison!"

"And for whom you were made a guy of by his wife!" was the sneering retort. "He is in hiding in New York, and I believe that I can lay my hands upon him at any moment! Compared with some others, he is the lesser villain, and I want the whole nest at one swoop."

"His wife?" whispered Alston, huskily.

"The woman who sent you the telegram—Isabel Russell!"

Alston clutched at the wall for support.

"Here is my carriage, sir! Step in, please," continued the detective, briskly. "My business with you will not occupy many minutes, and it is greatly in the interest of your friend who is locked up in the Tombs!"

Sick at heart and bewildered, Edgar Alston obeyed. Was he beginning to doubt the truth of his divinity? No, not he. He loved her yet! He would stand by her, and defy the whole world!

CHAPTER XIV.

EDGAR ALSTON'S BETTER SIDE.

The carriage pulled up before the Athenian Club, and the detective followed young Alston's lead into the smoking-room.

A watchful attendant secured a quiet corner, and stood prepared to supply their wants and fence off intruders.

"You will come to the point quickly, Hawkley?" Edgar said. "I have several matters needing my attention to-night."

The detective smiled as he bit the end of his cigar.

"I think I can guess a part, at least, of your projected movements, but the lovely Queenie will refuse to see you! She has another in her net."

Alston was about to make a savage rejoinder, when Nat held up a warning finger, and continued:

"Now listen to me, sir. I took a liking to you from the moment I saw you. You'll excuse a little plain speaking, because I am double your age, and a man of the world. You may resent the familiarity of a common policeman, but allow me to unmask myself—after you have sworn never to divulge my secret until you have permission to do so."

"Your secrets do not interest me," retorted Alston.

"That remains to be seen. Now, sir, your promise!"

"It is yours," indifferently. "I have told you that I

have other business in hand. I must find bail for my friend. I have been to see my father, but he is out. I had the temerity to dare face him after all that has passed so recently."

"You are good-natured," smiled Hawkley, "but a fool!" Alston started and glared at his companion.

"You are dangerous to yourself and those who love you best; you are weak, impulsive, vain, and stupid."

"Do you want me to punch your infernal head?"

"You will not attempt that, Mr. Edgar Alston, and some day you will reckon me your best friend. You need have no anxiety concerning the fate of Edward Hawley. His bail will be forthcoming; and as for the outcome of the trial—there will be none for him, because I saw the murder done!"

A mist swam before Alston's eyes.

"You!"

"I!"

There was silence for a minute. The young man dared not put the question. His heart yearned for Isabel, and yet if she were a murderess!

A wave of horror passed over him, and he shuddered. The pure sweet face of his sister floated before him, and the flash of Queenie's glorious eyes turned to a snaky glitter.

"Then my old school chum is safe. Thank God!"

"Thank God!" repeated Hawkley, "for that, and thank God, also, that the vilest creature in the shape of woman is nearly run to earth. Stimson died by the hand of Isabel Russell—my legal wife!"

The spell was dissolving from about the younger man, and a look of horror was in his eyes.

"Great Heaven! no!" he gasped.

"I have spoken the truth. I married that woman seven years since in Philadelphia. I was a leading lawyer there—a wealthy man. I was fooled by her, as you have been fooled, and am supposed to be dead. I was the first victim who went so far as marriage. The day after the ceremony I was drugged by her, and my body tossed into the river by the convict who escaped recently from the State prison at Frankfort. He has been her favored lover from first to last. She is shielding him now. How I was rescued does not matter, but the finger of fate was in it. My death was reported and generally accepted, and I lived only to be revenged upon the beautiful traitress who had eased me of a fortune. My real name is Russell, and she retains it, quite certain that the grave will not give up its dead."

"I am appalled by my own folly," groaned Edgar.

"I pity more than I blame you," replied Hawkley, "because I have gone through the same ordeal. Her power is marvelous. While she repels, it is impossible to escape her toils, and she uses her victims as stepping-stones to higher game. Even her confederates are subservient to the same power."

"I must see St. Leonards," Edgar exclaimed, suddenly.
"Help me to hunt him up. Perhaps he has not parted with
the money yet."

"The proceeds of your notes?" smiled Hawkley. "My dear sir, that was divided hours ago!"

"Divided! Do you mean to say that he—"

"Is not Lord St. Leonards any more than you are! His make-up is perfect. He is an English swindler, wanted for more than one fraud in the old country. To his asso-

ciates here he is Mitford Palmer. One of your gentlemanly scoundrels, whose abilities, turned in a different direction, would have made an able diplomat. The time is nearly ripe for me to strike, and I intend taking the whole nest. They have an inkling that I am on their track, but regard me merely as a blundering policeman of the usual order. The woman will ruin the game yet!"

Alston sat perfectly bewildered.

"I think my lesson is about complete," he said, at last.

"And I find some satisfaction in knowing that my immaculate father does not come out quite scatheless! He would venture his last dollar on the man he is trying to get my sister to marry! But what of the real St. Leonards?"

"Arrived at Sydney, Australia, yesterday. But for the woman the men would vanish with their booty. Think as kindly of your father as you can. He is in the siren's parlor at this moment, with the intention of buying her off!"

Edgar sprang to his feet with an oath.

"It must not be. I loathe her! Not another dollar shall she have!"

"We cannot interfere for a day or two," Hawkley said.
"Things must go on as they are. My chain of evidence is not quite complete. They shall not escape me!"

There was a savage glare in his eyes, and the muscles of his hands stood out in massive ridges.

"In one thing only have I failed," went on the detective, "I have not yet succeeded in locating Roseberry—the man whom Isabel favors, and to whom I believe she has been married since she believed me to be dead."

"The escaped convict?"

"The same! In this you may help me, as you have had free access to my lady's bower!"

Alston flushed with genuine mortification.

"I understand that there is a servant-girl, who is in reality the sister of Roseberry, and a lady who passes as Isabel's aunt in the flat which you have furnished so charmingly!" went on Mr. Hawkley. "Can you describe the aunt?"

"A tall woman, rather dark. That is practically all I know about her," replied Alston.

"There is an aunt in reality, you know. In a couple of days, at most, I shall be no longer in doubt. Well, I think that I can rely upon your discretion, Mr. Alston," concluded the detective. "Not one word to a living soul! I have taken Mr. Hawley's counsel into my confidence, and if you meet me at his office to-morrow at ten in the morning, we will secure his release."

They shook hands cordially, and when Hawkley was gone, Edgar sat in silent thought for upward of an hour. His position was bitterly humiliating, and he felt that his name would soon be a by-word and a jest the length and breadth of the land.

"At last," he muttered, savagely. "I am constrained to acknowledge that my flinty-hearted father knew what was best for me after all, though his own blunders in connection with the bogus St. Leonards have evened things up pretty much."

This was one grain of comfort, but the way in which he had played into the hands of the sham nobleman maddened him.

"By Heaven, I could choke him!"

He retired to rest but there was no sleep for him. It was a night of remorse. How well he remembered now that he had gone to Cincinnati almost at the express request of his beautiful temptress. To her he had confided most of his family history. To her he had spoken half jestingly of his duty visits to his Aunt Radcliffe in Cincinnati.

"My sister is staying there," he had said," I ought to escort her home, but cannot bear to tear myself away from you!"

"Poor dear boy, you must go! It may be the last time for years! Your proud aunt will never forgive you for caring for poor me! I will write to you—I promise that."

He went, and had been made a tool of. All this while the siren was in communication with her convict husband by means of some secret cipher. He had been lured to Covington where the fellow was in hiding and laughed at!

He gnashed his teeth in bitterest rage! And since then he had been robbed of an enormous sum of money—his father had been robbed—through him!

He was at the office of Edward Hawley's counsel early next morning, but Detective Hawkley did not put in an appearance. They waited until eleven o'clock, when the lawyer said:

"Foul play! He will not come at all, Mr. Alston." Edgar's face was pale and stern.

"It is hard to believe that such villainy can be in the very heart of New York!"

"And will never cease until men are strong enough to withstand the wiles of bad women," the lawyer replied, sharply.

He summoned an office-boy and dispatched him for a cab.

"Hawkley promised to find bail," he went on. "My chief clerk will attend to Hawley's business until we have made a few visits."

"How much money will be wanted?"

"Twenty thousand dollars, probably. I am not at liberty to speak what I know without Hawkley's permission. He may be on the track of the birds, but I fear the worst. No word of him, you see, and he is punctuality itself."

"Telegrams miscarry sometimes," Edgar said. "Don't worry about the money. My father will find it. I feel that he will do anything for me now that he sees I am thoroughly repentant."

The lawyer smiled.

They left the office and entered the cab, which was ordered to No. — East Thirty-fourth street, the residence of Hawkley.

When the cab stopped, the janitor came forward.

"Mr. Hawkley in?" asked the lawyer.

"No, sir."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"Yes, he went away early," the man replied.

Alston breathed freely again.

"You are sure of it?"

"Quite sure, sir; I wished him good-morning. I was just sweeping down the stairs."

"Strange!" muttered the lawyer. Then, aloud: "I think he lives in a couple of rooms—quite alone?"

"Yes, sir. Furnished rooms, and my wife cleans them up for him. When he's in he always has his meals up

stairs. He came home late last night, and went out again before daylight. He told me he might be away a day or two."

The lawyer hesitated a moment, then he said:

"Much obliged," and tossed the man a coin. "No. — Park avenue." he called to the driver. "Hurry up."

Alston flushed and paled by turns.

"What is your theory now?" he demanded.

"I am half in doubt," was the reply. "I believe that the janitor is an honest fellow, but I can't understand Hawkley. The nest in Park avenue may have been broken up, and the detective is on the scent. I am going there to convince myself. We have to deal with a gang of the cutest swindlers the present century has seen. The more terrible their situation, the brighter their wits. No ordinary man can cope with them, and the presiding genius is a woman. It was a woman who indirectly caused the downfall of the most remarkable statesman of any age. Princess Marie d'Orleans was the conscious artificer of Bismarck's ruin—while kings and empires trembled at his word! It has ever been so, and will go on until the world is in ashes."

When the cab turned into Park avenue Alston felt his heart leap with fury. Isabel Russell's power was gone. In its place was something akin to the hate that burned in Hawkley's breast.

Outwardly the building looked the same, and the lawyer decided first to put one or two questions to the janitor.

These elicited nothing. So many people came in and out that he had noticed no one in particular. The tenants of the apartments indicated had certainly not gone away to his knowledge. Meanwhile, Edgar had remained seated in the cab, but at a signal from the lawyer, he joined him.

"Precede me up stairs, Mr. Alston," he said. "I presume you have a latch-key?"

Edgar acknowledged that he had been so far favored, a guilty flush mounting to his brow, but that there were times when it was useless.

"Aha! When the she-devil had another of her playthings in the way!"

The latch-key would not open the door, and Alston knocked smartly.

"They have not gone yet," the lawyer whispered, "and I intend to put the place in the hands of the police forthwith! I will bear the blame if I do wrong."

A bolt was shot back, and the door was opened by a seedy-looking fellow, who regarded them questioningly.

"Hello!" he said. "What do you want?"

"Is Miss Russell within?" demanded the lawyer.

"Don't know nobody of that name," replied the man, curtly. "Ask the people in the next flat."

He attempted to kick the door to, but Alston pushed forward.

"This place belongs to me," he said. "I am the tenant, and all the furniture is mine."

"Indeed!"

The man laughed.

"I don't think it is, though. My boss bought and paid for it not an hour since, and we're going to move it this morning. I'm left here in charge till the van comes along!"

He handed to the lawyer the card of his employer who

could produce receipts, and explain under what circumstances the goods had been purchased.

This man was visited at once, but he could only repeat what had already been told them. It was his business to buy second-hand goods. A gentleman had called upon him the previous day, explaining that he was wishful to sell his furniture because the woman he had been supporting had deserted him. Having assured himself that it was free of a chattel mortgage, he had paid cash for it and left a man in possession. His description of the gentleman who had conducted the transaction tallied with that of the sham St. Leonards. Such transactions were of almost daily occurrence.

The lawyer and Edgar Alston returnued to their cab completely nonplused.

"Baffled! We will go back to my office and see if any telegram or news of Hawkley has arrived. It is possible that he is tracking this Mitford Palmer, who has been masquerading as Lord St. Leonards."

There was no message at the office, and they were taken down town to the great Wall street financier.

"You will permit me to have five minutes with my father alone," Edgar said. "By the way, I do not know your name. sir."

"Abel McKeen, of the firm of McKeen & Co. I guess Mr. Jabez Alston and I have met before. I will remain in the waiting-room. You have a good nerve, young man, after all that has passed!"

Edgar pushed his way through the clerk's office, and was conscious of a sudden cessation of the half-audible whispering, mingled with the scratching of a hundred pens.

Mr. Billings, the confidential manager, started with surprise, and hurried from his office.

"Is my father here?" stammered Edgar.

"Yes, Mr. Edgar; but——"

"That is sufficient."

"You will permit me to announce you?"

"No, I might be refused an audience, and it is most urgent. Is he alone?"

Billings replied in the affirmative, and having tapped the door of his father's private room, the young man stepped inside.

Jabez Alston was a man of iron nerves, but he could not control his astonishment at being thus suddenly confronted by his erring son.

"Edgar!" he ejaculated; then he turned away his face, and his knees trembled under him.

Edgar did not notice this, but burst out impulsively:

"I have not come to make excuses for my unpardonable conduct, father. I am here on behalf of an innocent man who is lying in prison."

"How do you know that he is innocent?"

There was an impatient ring in Jabez Alston's tones.

"Mr. McKeen, his counsel, is without. He has absolute proof that Hawley never injured the murdered man."

"And what do you want of me?"

"The amount of his bail assured—a matter of a few thousands."

"And why should you apply to me?" demanded Jabez Alston, sternly. "If you care so much for your friend, surely it will be no hardship to employ a portion of that which I was forced to make good yesterday."

He paused and fixed a penetrating glance upon his son.

"Father!" cried the young man, in agony, "I have acted the part of a fool—a madman; but I have not been responsible for my actions! Do not judge me too hardly! When I signed your name, I knew not what I was doing. I was under some spell of enchantment."

"Drunk!" murmured the elder man.

Then aloud:

"And the money?"

"I have never seen one dollar of it—but," fiercely, "it shall every cent be returned to you."

Jabez Alston smiled, then looked pityingly toward his son. Edgar did not understand that glance then, but he had cause to remember it long afterward.

"I forgive you freely; we are all weak. It is human to be weak, and you are young!"

His son was almost overwhelmed. He had never expected such kindness as this.

"Father, you shall have no cause to complain of me hereafter. I have learned my lesson. I have been scorched, and thank the blessed fates, I am not destroyed. I shall never see Isabel Russell again. I hate and abhor her now!"

The financier moved uneasily in his seat, and averted his face.

"I am glad to hear it," was all he replied. "You will return to your duties, Edgar—you will go home at once—you will attend to your business at the office. And now about Hawley. I am glad to believe that he is innocent. I will do what I can for him, on one condition. He must give up all pretension to the hand of your sister—particu-

larly after this scandal. You know my wishes—you know that I am determined that she shall marry Lord St. Leonards!"

Edgar sprang up and paced the floor. He must not break the confidence that had been reposed in him. He smiled inwardly. His sister had not much to fear from Lord St. Leonards!

"I do not think that Ned Hawley will ever stand in his light, father," he replied. "Without your sanction, he never shall."

"Then I will empower his counsel to use my name for any reasonable amount."

He turned to press an electric button in his desk, but paused.

"Edgar," he said, "the past is forgotten. Understand, I care nothing for the money. It is your loss, as the duties of this business may soon devolve upon you, under the guidance of Billings. I have suddenly conceived the idea of retiring. With you and Minnie married—and you will be sure to marry soon—the old home will be dull and lonesome. I may marry again!"

"Father!"

If the earth had opened Edgar could not have been more astonished.

"There, we will say no more about it at present. Only be as lenient toward me, should occasion ever arise for my actions to be subject to your criticisms, as I have been to you. Shake hands, boy. Now let Mr. McKeen be shown in!"

CHAPTER XV.

DISASTER FOR DETECTIVE HAWKLEY.

That same day Edward Hawley was admitted to bail, upon the urgent representation of his able counsel, that the police were upon the track of the real murderer.

He at once hastened to his mother, accompanied by Edgar Alston, and, after a half-hour's earnest conversation, his spirits resumed their usual buoyancy.

"Your father's conduct is extraordinary," he said. "There must be a stratum of warmth underlying his outward coldness. I never dreamed that he would forgive you so soon, and so completely. As for myself, I am content to abide by the terms you have made, and you will take my message to Minnie! You do not object to me now as your future brother-in-law, old man?"

A silent pressure of hands was the only reply, and Hawley could scarcely believe that he was the miserable, hopeless wretch of a few short hours ago. He had heard the whole story of Isabel Russell.

Edgar remained to dinner with the Hawleys, then went back to his hotel, where he gave instructions for his trunks to be sent back home.

It was growing dark when he mounted the marble steps, and his heart beat lighter than he had known it for years.

"Send my sister to me," he told the footman, airily.

'And order my apartments to be aired and put in habitable shape.''

The wondering servant went away, for the sudden departure of Mr. Edgar had been the gossip of the hour.

Minnie ran into the room, her sweet face drawn with anxiety.

"Edgar!"

She was bewildered by his happy smiles.

"I have good news, dear," he said, kissing her fondly. "Edward is safe at home, and entirely out of danger! And behold in your erring brother a changed man! The metamorphosis is complete! The spell is lifted, and I am awake again! But I suppose papa has told you something of my regeneration? And that I have returned home again like the penitent prodigal, though how I shall liquidate the debts I have contracted, Heaven only knows! I will never touch whisky again! The fiery spirit has ever been my besetting sin. And let me whisper in your ear, little sis, your marriage with Edward is certain, and Lord St. Leonards is nowhere! At present I am not at liberty to say more!"

"Oh, Edgar!"

That was all that Minnie could give utterance to for a few moments. The news seemed to be too good to be true.

"You have seen papa?" she added, her face covered with happy blushes.

"And am forgiven! The old man is a brick! The woman who enslaved me—who made a miserable tool of me, I now loathe more than I can tell. Do not ask me more at present. In a very short time you will know all. It is a terrible story. Is my father busy?"

Minnie opened her eyes in wonderment.

"I thought you knew. He told me this morning not to expect him, as he had pressing business some distance from New York. He will probably not return home tonight, and I am so glad that you are here!"

"Strange!" muttered Edgar; "but I suppose it is all right."

It was late when he retired, and his last thoughts were of his father and Detective Hawkley.

While these important events are crowding one upon another, how have matters fared with the detective?

When he left the Athenian Club, after his conversation with Edgar Alston, it was his intention to go to his apartments. His business for the day had been concluded in a most satisfactory manner, and he fully believed that within a few hours the whole of his fish would be landed!

"I will face her!" he hissed. "I will unmask her at the last moment, and the wrongs of the past will be fully avenged! Curse her fair face! Curse her black heart! For years have I been baffled, but the men who call themselves Roseberry and Palmer shall acknowledge that I am their master at last!"

Unconsciously his footsteps wandered in the direction of the well-known apartment-house on Park avenue, and he turned his eyes toward the two brilliantly illumined windows of the floor occupied by the traitress and her confederates, who lived but to prey upon their fellow-creatures.

Muttering a savage oath of triumph, he was passing on when he saw that which filled him with astonishment.

The fashionable coupe of the great Wall street financier drove up to the door, and five minutes later Jabez Alston

himself left the house of the deceiver, entered the carriage, and was rapidly driven homeward.

"I understood that it was possible Jabez Alston would try and buy up my beauteous Isabel," he thought, "but I did not think that he would remain five or six hours in my lady's parlor, and finally leave it in an advanced state of intoxication!"

He could not resist a chuckle, and having taken a final glance at the brilliant windows above, he turned away.

"If I were sure," he muttered, "that the aunt is Gilbert Roseberry in disguise, the whole nest should be secured to-morrow! I must not blunder this time. He is as slippery as an eel, and I do not forget who supplanted me in her affections! Bah! I am a fool still! But I hate him! He it was who cast me into the river to drown!"

He walked rapidly until he reached Thirty-fourth street, when he was rudely jostled by a man who appeared to be the worse for drink.

"Sorry, ole boysh," he hiccoughed; "dashed sorry.

Letsh have a drink!"

Hawkley was about to move aside, when he received a terrific blow over the head with a piece of lead pipe.

The supposed drunken man had straightened up like a dart, and moved with the activity and ferocity of a tiger.

As Hawkley reeled, he seized him in a pair of powerful arms, carried him half a block, and deposited him through the doors of a basement, which opened conveniently at the proper moment. Casting a swift glance behind, and feeling assured that his assault upon the detective had not been noticed, he, too, dropped into the cellar, and closed the doors after him.

"A lucky stroke that," he said to the man in charge.
"Now see here, Stumpy, mum's the word, and you get a
hundred-dollar bill for your trouble, if you do as I tell you
to do. I have no wish to kill this fellow, but he has become a duse of a nuisance."

"Make it two hundred," replied the man—an ugly dwarf with a grimy face. "And I'll risk it. I'll swear he fell down here, and that'll be all I know about it. We were pals on the Island, and may be again some day!"

"Not if I know it," shuddered Palmer, for he it was.

He bent over the prostrate Hawkley, adding:

"By thunder! I must have hit him hard. He won't wake up for a few hours, and when he does he won't know anything. Lend a hand to carry him into the room beyond where we can exchange clothing. Where's my valise?"

"Safe!"

In a few minutes Palmer was attired in Hawkley's clothing, and proceeded to make himself up exactly like the detective, with the aid of a wig, a false beard, and some paint.

"Elegant," grinned the dwarf. "You'll pass for him anywhere, Palmer."

Palmer smiled.

"I guess that will put an end to Mr. Detective's little game, at least until we are safe away. Why not quit this hole, Stumpy, and leave him to his fate."

"How much?"

The man's eyes shone with avarice.

"You see I run a big risk. Flight is an admission of guilt, and my record is bad!"

"Five hundred?"

"A thousand!"

"It shall be yours. Meet me to-morrow morning, seven o'clock sharp, at the old place. If I fail you, you are at liberty to give me away!"

"I am not afraid. I shall be back in Germany before he is discovered. I don't think he will speak again!"

A little later Mitford Palmer wished him good-night, and walked direct to Hawkley's apartment. He had possessed himself of the whole of his papers and latch-key.

"I can sleep here as well as anywhere else," he thought, "and must take care to show myself to the janitor in the morning. He will then answer any inquiries that may be made in a suitable manner."

He let himself into the detective's rooms, slept soundly until four o'clock in the morning, then carefully dressed. The likeness would have almost deceived Hawkley himself, and Palmer smiled.

"If I were superstitious," he thought, as he surveyed his reflection in the glass, "I should be half inclined to believe that the ghost of the meddlesome detective stood before me! I wonder if he is dead?"

He waited until he heard the janitor moving about below, then he opened his door quietly and went down stairs.

In the half light he had no fear that his disguise would be penetrated, and he nodded in a familiar way at the man, saying:

"Don't be surprised if I'm not back for a day or two, janitor. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, Mr. Hawkley," was the reply, and Mitford Palmer passed out into the street with a satisfied smile on his evil face.

"I wonder if I could imitate the detective's voice like that again," he laughed to himself.

He hesitated a moment, and gave a swift glance to the right and left. Then he started with quick steps in the direction of Park avenue, muttering:

"In a couple of hours the birds will have flown! Who holds the trump card, Mr. Nathaniel Hawkley? Next I must settle matters with Stumpy, and when he is disposed of, I fight for Isabel and liberty!"

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CHAPTER XVI.

NO. 33 HAWTHORNE AVENUE, RIDGEWAY, N J.

The flinty-hearted financier was driven to the apartment house on Park avenue with the set determination in his heart of saving his son at almost any cost from the wiles of an unscrupulous siren.

"The creature cares nothing for the mad-brained fool," he thought, his thin lips wreathing with contempt. "Has not St. Leonards told me so? It is a stern duty—it is a natural duty that I make one more effort to save the boy, and now I am possessed of a lever which he dare not try to withstand. If he does, by Heaven, I will forget that I am his father, and he shall feel the cold steel about his wrists! Even this would be a kindness to him! Bah! why should I doubt the power of this!"

He tapped his breast-pocket, wherein was hidden his check-book.

"This painted Jezebel—this modern Delilah will perhaps drive a hard bargain, but the victory is mine!"

When the coupe stopped before the building, wherein resided the beautiful Isabel, a smile of fierce derision passed over his hard face. He sprang to the pavement, saying to the coachman:

"Be here in half an hour, William. I do not care for my carriage to be seen standing in this neighborhood."

The discreet William understood, and in one minute the

financier's coupe was being slowly driven in the direction of Central Park.

Jabez Alston strode firmly up the broad steps, and for one moment stood irresolute in the portico. Why was this sudden fear? How many times had he faced the fiercest crisis, without a tremor, when millions were at stake, and now his heart failed him on the threshold of a siren's bower!

"Who are you looking for, sir?" the voice of the janitor broke in. He had observed the arrival of the carriage, and followed the financier into the portico.

"Ah!" replied Jabez Alston, flushing. "Does a persona lady reside here named Russell?"

"Third floor, sir," the man said.

"Thank you!"

He fancied that there was a faint smile of amusement on the janitor's face, and turned abruptly toward the stairs. He strode up in a dignified manner, muttering between his teeth:

"I will crush this den of infamy!"

He ascended to the third floor, then tapped smartly on one of the doors in the richly carpeted hallway. He was not kept waiting one needless moment, for the janitor had taken the precaution to ring the electric bell, and almost before he was aware of it, Jabez Alston found himself being ushered into a splendidly appointed parlor by a servant-maid.

"I would like to see your mistress for a short time, alone," he said, tendering his card.

The girl withdrew, and he looked about him with keen interest. The costly furniture, the velvet carpets, the pictures in their lavish settings, the richly embroidered silk curtains, the bric-a-brac and ornaments, he knew intuitively were the gifts of his deluded son.

"She is evidently of musical tastes," he sneered to himself. "A mandolin, a harp, a piano, and a zither! But of course the woman has been a singer and a dancer before the footlights! Now I can mentally conjure before me the creature with whom I have to deal! A bold-eyed, florid beauty, with the arts and cunning of Satan!"

He sniffed at the delicately scented air, for the subtlety of the siren's presence was felt everywhere.

All at once there was the rustle of drapery; the silk embroidered portieres that screened a farther chamber were gently parted, revealing a woman, the most beautiful and bewitching he had ever beheld.

Jabez Alston rose to his feet, saying, politely:

"Miss Isabel Russell?" To himself he thought: "By heaven, I don't wonder at the poor boy's infatuation!"

The siren advanced toward him with a half timidity that was charming, every movement one of studied grace, and murmured in musical accents.

"You are Edgar's father—I know it, because he has told me of you, and how you hate me!"

There was a piteous note in the concluding words, and the financier courteously conducted Isabel to a lounge, for she had paused before him, a pathetic pleading in her luminous eyes.

"Impossible, madame," he said. "How could I hate you, when I have never seen you until this moment? It is true that I have felt some alarm concerning my son's love

escapades. I heard that you had been a danseuse, and naturally concluded that——"

"I was no suitable wife for the son of a New York millionaire!" Miss Russell added, brightly.

"Yes," assented Jabez Alston, half reluctantly, feasting his eyes upon her wondrous beauty, "but I had no idea that you were a lady," he added, lamely.

She was smiling at him brightly now, and he began to feel uneasy.

"I am waiting to hear the storm of wrath that you had prepared for me, Mr. Alston," Isabel said, softly. "Do you know that I felt afraid of you when I read the name on the card that you sent in? I expected to meet an ogre, or something else equally terrible."

Mr. Alston flushed guiltily, and began to envy his son the possession of this glorious woman.

"Now tell me, honestly," she went on, with an ingenuousness that bewildered him, "now tell me all that you intended saying to me."

"No, I cannot," Jabez said. "I could not be unkind to you ''

He felt the hot blood pulsing through every artery in his being.

"That is a confession," she told him. "You did mean to be unkind to me!"

Her eyes compelled him to make answer, and he replied:

"I could not be harsh toward a lady so beautiful and so good—yes, I am sure that you are good—as you are lovely, Miss Russell. I expected to meet one of the ordinary dancing women-pretty, perhaps, but brazen and vulgar.

I came to ask such a creature to release my silly son—I came to purchase his release."

Isabel opened her eyes in well-simulated wonderment; then she said, haughtily:

"I would not accept one penny of your money, Mr. Alston. I would enter no family that refused to honor me!"

"But you are not the creature I expected to see," he interrupted, hastily. "You are too good—a million times too good for my hot-headed, capricious boy."

Her face was averted, and he thought that he saw tears trembling on her eyelids.

"Have I insulted her?" he thought. "Great Heaven, I would rather root out my tongue!"

"Miss Russell!" he cried, "pardon me, I beg."

He was beside her, and had seized one of her hands. The very touch was like an electric thrill.

"Miss Russell!"

She turned her lovely eyes to his, and they were swimming in tears.

"I was hurt a little," she whispered. "Oh, Mr. Alston, it seems horrible that you should have thought me capable of being so dreadful a woman! Now if you will sit beside me, I will make a confession that may surprise you."

The financier obeyed, his brain in a whirl, a delightful thrill at his heart.

For a minute he strove to conquer the mad delirium, then he regretted with exceeding bitterness that the days of his youth were past, and he felt that he almost hated Edgar for being young and handsome.

"You may hold my hand if you like," Isabel said, softly.

"My fear of you has gone, Mr. Alston. I have heard so much of the terrible millionaire that I naturally expected to meet a monster in human shape. And then, millionaires in any form are usually supposed to be awe-inspiring beings!"

She spoke with a simple naivete that was irresistible, and he gallantly kissed her taper fingers, replying:

"Excuse me, Miss Russell. Some day you may be my daughter!"

He uttered the words, a bitter pang at his heart.

"No," she said, sadly but earnestly; "I can never be that, Mr. Alston. I am sorry for Edgar, but I do not love him. He is altogether too young and irresponsible. His fancy is too fleeting. He professes that his passion for me is consuming him, but I know only too well that it is all on the surface, and the next pretty face will disillusionize him. Until I meet with one whom I can respect as well as love, I will never marry. A woman cannot respect a man years younger than herself."

She cast upon him one of her bewitching glances, and the world was forgotten!

"I am a Bohemian," she went on, "and most of my friends are Bohemians. Society does not regard us kindly but there is a charm in our unconventional lives that the slaves of society may never enjoy. It is wrong for me to entertain you, Mr. Alston, but where is the harm?"

"It is not wrong, Miss Russell," he said, hoarsely; "it is delightful."

"If you think so, I shall ask you to sup with me. My aunt can play propriety!"

She laughed mockingly, and a minute later was rippling

off a song at the piano, in tones that thrilled the old financier through and through. For ten or fifteen minutes she sang and played, then suddenly sprang up and rang a bell, in obedience to which the maid brought in a variety of wines.

"If you care to smoke, Mr. Alston," said Isabel, when the girl had retired, "pray do so. I love the fumes of good tobacco, and—shall I confess it?—I am occasionally fond of a cigarette myself! Are you shocked?" she added, softly.

"Shocked!" he murmured. "My Heaven, everything that you do is perfect, Miss Russell!"

He sipped his wine, and his eyes rarely left her face. The very glamour of her witching presence steeped his senses in a mad delirium.

The hours passed, and he forgot his waiting coachman. He supped with the enchantress, and listened to the music of her tones, and reveled in the beauty of her smiles until he felt that for one sweet word from her the world were all well lost!

At last he was startled by the chiming of one hour from midnight, and he prepared to fly from her presence.

"Shall we ever meet again," she said, sadly.

"We must," he replied, fiercely. "Oh, Isabel—I am an old man, but within me you have awakened the fires of youth! I am rich, and my fortune shall be lavished upon you. People will call me weak and childish, but I care for nothing if you will smile upon me."

He fell upon his knees, and kissed her hands abjectly, while maudlin tears streamed from his eyes.

"I leave here at once," she whispered. "I leave here to

escape the attentions of your son. You shall have my new address to-morrow!"

"Oh, Isabel! One word of hope!" he gasped.

"It is yours, Mr. Alston. I can love and respect a man—but a boy, never!"

She permitted him to kiss and fondle her hands, and at length he reeled into the street—her terrible spell upon him.

The next morning he received in a scented envelope a card, upon which was penciled:

"Dear Mr. Alston:—My future address is No. 33 Hawthorne avenue, Ridgeway, New Jersey. Do not let Edgar know of it for worlds. I shall expect you soon. "Yours, Isabel Russell."

The foolish old man pressed the writing to his lips, in a frenzy of delight.

"I am not too old to love," he thought, "with a passion that young men never dream of!"

CHAPTER XVII.

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A FATHER'S THREAT.

The change that took place in Jabez Alston was marvelous. It was noticed at home, at the office, and among business friends, who commented upon it freely.

Though scrupulously neat and clean at all times, the financier had never cared for fashionable clothing. He rather affected the puritan dress of two or three decades past, and delighted in a high keen-edged collar that seemed to accentuate the stern lines in his thin face, and give him generally an appearance of resolute coldness.

For thirty years he had never been known to be half an hour late at business. He had shot through the outer office, never deigning to notice any one except to cast a fierce glance at some delinquent caught whispering. For thirty years had this been his rule, and now he had missed business for two whole days in one week, and had been seen in Broadway attired in a suit of the latest cut and pattern!

If the metamorphosis of Alston, senior, was a matter for curious speculation, so was the remarkable change in Alston, junior.

Edgar attended to business with the regularity of clockwork, and, under the guidance of Billings, made progress that was astonishing to himself and those friends who cared to interest themselves in his movements. He worked early and late, and there was an eager restlessness in his manner that convinced Billings that the young man was overdoing things.

"Edgar, you cannot estimate what joy this change for the better gives to me. My boy,"—he spoke nervously—"I intend retiring from the firm. I am growing old, while you are full of youth and vigor. I have wasted the best years of my manhood, but it is not too late to try and make amends. Of course, when the old ship needs my hand at the helm in times of storm, I shall be within call, but that will not be often."

He paced the carpeted floor restlessly, and averted his eyes from those of his son.

"This is most unexpected, father," Edgar replied. "I wonder that you dare place so much confidence in me—after—after—"

"Don't mention it, my boy—don't mention it. I have been hard, callous, cruel! I have made no allowance for the fire that is natural to young blood. Again, I cannot but admire your courage, upon finding that your latest—ah—love affair did not——"

"Father, if you love me," Edgar interrupted, "never mention that wanton to me again! I have rooted the shedevil out of my heart!"

Jabez Alston held up one hand imploringly.

"There, there," he said. "You will forgive her some day."

"Never! Curse her!" the young man answered, vehemently. "Now, father, let us understand each other, once and for all. At last I realize my duty to myself—to you,

and to the community at large. There is no fear that I shall ever fall again. I am a changed being. You profess to have forgiven all, and to repose in me your confidence. I am glad of this, and while things are undergoing so happy a change, I desire you to make me one promise that affects the life-long happiness of my sister and your daughter, Minnie."

The financier frowned, and for a moment the old lines came into his face.

"You are about to speak of Hawley," he said, slowly. "Do not ask too much of me. Remember that he is under the grave charge of murder."

"I have not forgotten this, neither have I forgotten that the day of his trial is fast approaching, but I swear that he will not be called upon to stand in the dock, for I have discovered the real murderer!"

Mr. Alston raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"If that is so," he said, "time will prove it, and upon one condition I give my full consent to Edward Hawley's marriage with my daughter. Upon one condition, I renounce the hopes of years, and will request Lord St. Leonards——"

"The condition!" interrupted Edgar, a bitter smile wreathing his lips at the mention of the false St. Leonards.

The financier regarded him keenly for a minute, then averted his eyes, saying:

"My son, I am nearly sixty years of age, and I have had enough of the rocks and thorns of life. I have accumulated a vast fortune, half of which I intend enjoying—probably in the married state." He halted and flashed a quick glance at his son. "Yes, 'he went on, "I meditate mar-

riage—immediate marriage. The other half of my fortune I will settle upon you, Edgar, and Minnie—upon the condition that you welcome my wife."

"Great Heaven!" gasped Edgar.

"Yes, I know that it is sudden, but men much older than I marry again."

"I don't see how I dare object, sir," Edgar said, after a minute's silence, "even if I desired to do so. I am sure that your offer is most magnanimous. What is the lady's name? Who is she?"

"For the present that remains a secret," his father replied. "At the lady's request."

He gave utterance to an insane chuckle, and Edgar eyed him in wonderment.

"Welcome my wife, Edgar, in a way that is due to your new mother, and that very day you and Minnie become possessed of half my fortune. Slight her, and by Heaven, sir, I wash my hands of both of you!"

"The marriage—when will it take place?" the young man asked.

"Privately, and within a few days. Be prepared for anything. I have nothing more to say at present. Er—you need not expect me home to-night. I have business to attend to in Philadelphia."

He tapped the glass window to summon Billings, whose office adjoined that of his own, and when the cashier appeared he demanded the check-book.

"Make a check for five thousand dollars," he ordered, "payable to self, and get it cashed at once."

Billings obeyed, and half an hour later Jabez Alston was driven away in a private carriage.

When he was gone Billings approached Edgar with a troubled face.

"I hope that nothing is wrong, sir?" he ventured.

"Why should you think so? I do not understand you."

"I have been with this house for twenty-nine years, Mr. Edgar, and never before knew the principal to draw a penny, much less fifteen thousand dollars, without satisfactorily accounting for it."

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" exclaimed Edgar.

"Yes, sir! And all within three days."

"Well, I suppose my father can do as he pleases with his own money, Billings."

"Yes, sir, but it's irregular—very irregular in a house like this."

He half turned to go away, and Edgar said, quietly:

"Is that all that is on your mind, Billings?"

"No, sir, not quite. The pass-book has just been sent in from Terhune's Bank. There is an item of twenty thousand dollars which I know nothing of. It does not appear in the cash-book, and has been drawn against a counter check. I never knew Mr. Alston to use a counter check before."

"Did you mention the matter to my father?"

"No, sir; I did not discover it until he had gone."

"Verify the signature at once, Billings, and say nothing to any one," Edgar concluded. "I am going away on important business. If you have anything to communicate, telegraph home."

Billings retired, and young Alston took a telegram from his pocket, which read as follows: "If possible, see me at Twenty-third street to-day. I have a surprise for you. HAWLEY."

"And I have news for you, my boy!" Edgar muttered.

He returned the crumpled telegram to his pocket, put on his hat, and left the office.

A hundred steps through the street, and he hailed a cab that was just passing the corner, sprang in, and ordered the driver to take him to Hawley's address in Twenty-third street. Arrived there, he dismissed the cabman and ran up the stairs to his friend's apartments, two steps at a time.

"Well," greeted Hawley, feverishly, "I have news at last. The detective has turned up!"

"Hawkley?"

"Yes, poor devil! Come here before daybreak this morning, about half dead. It seems that he was waylaid by St. Leonards, sand-bagged, and left to die in a cellar. He ultimately freed himself, after nearly three days of helplessness, and is now on the war-path for vengeance! But for this move on the part of the man who has so cleverly impersonated Lord St. Leonards the enemy would have been safely under lock and key. We have a desperate crew to deal with, but you know how much my fate depends upon their capture."

"I suppose that you have no clew?" asked Edgar.

"The whole lot have vanished as completely as though swallowed up by an earthquake. Oh, if they should get away after all, and I am tried for the murder of poor Stimson!"

"We must hope for the best. It seems to me that the world is suddenly turning topsy-turvy," Edgar replied. "No time must be lost, old man."

"I am having every port watched and a general alarm has been sent to all the police stations in New York and Brooklyn."

"I have news for you," Edgar remarked at length. "My father meditates matrimony."

"Good Heaven! no!"

"Yes, and there is some mystery about the bride-elect. None of us will be permitted to see her until the ceremony has been performed. If Minnie and I welcome the lady with open arms, my father promises each a fortune, and will never more interfere with our actions. He even accepts you as his future son-in-law, providing you prove your innocence of the crime with which you are charged."

"The latter part is welcome news, anyway," Edward replied, with a faint smile. "But you don't think the old gentleman is in his dotage, do you? Marriage at his time of life and mystery! Well, it never rains but it pours. You can't afford to run counter to his wishes, because he will have his way all the same. Secure the cash, old man, or it may all go to the new wife. Now, to clear myself, and all will be straight sailing!"

At that moment the door was pushed softly open, and Detective Nathaniel Hawkley appeared.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have heard a part of your conversation, and it has interested me greatly. We are on the eve of a great discovery."

Edgar shook him warmly by the hand, saying:

"Thank the fates that you escaped with your life, Hawkley."

"It was a close shave, sir, but by Heaven, I'll have a terrible revenge! I have splendid recuperative powers, and shall be as strong as ever in a few hours. I am like a tiger on the scent of blood. You are free of the enchant-ress forever?"

"Forever! Curse her!"

Hawkley smiled.

"Your father visited her to buy her off. I know this because I saw him go to her apartments."

Edgar flushed, and growled:

"A needless expense! That perhaps accounts for the twenty thousand dollars Billings is troubled about! You know that the nest is empty, Hawkley?"

"Mr. Hawley has told me everything. Now, sir,"—he bent closer to young Alston—"I overheard what you said of your father's projected marriage and the mystery surrounding the bride. Do you know who the lady is?"

"I haven't the faintest suspicion."

"Then I will tell you; it is Isabel Russell. He has succumbed to her witchery. This is the final coup of the gang. Of course, there will be no real wedding, but unless we act promptly, they will be on the high seas with a good slice of your father's fortune!"

"Impossible!" gasped Edgar, aghast.

The detective shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"To that fiend there are few things impossible!"

"Good Heaven, I believe that you have divined it! My father has gone to Philadelphia this morning. That is where they are hiding. He must be followed!"

"Softly. I am going on no wild-goose chase. I must have proof. His is a well-known figure, and will not be hard to trace. Leave all in my hands until to-morrow, but be ready for action at any time. Gentlemen, I require

your assistance to procure a disguise. This time I am determined not to fail. Mitford Palmer, alias Lord St. Leonards, believes me to be safely out of the way, therefore my movements will be unhampered. Ha! ha! I will run them to earth at last!" he hissed.

The young men attended to his wants, and an hour later an old man, in the guise of a farmer, left Hawley's apartments.

Before the door closed he said, with a perfect Western twang:

"Wal, boys, I guess I'll be along ag'in afore noon to-

So saying, he shambled down the stairs and into the street.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

RUN TO EARTH.

Minnie Alston heard the story that her brother had to relate that evening with tingling ears.

"Oh, Edgar, it is too terrible!" she said. "There must be some mistake. I cannot believe that papa would be so silly—so weak. I have heard him speak many times in tones of withering contempt of men who have done some wrong for the sake of a woman. And, then, he is so old! There must be some mistake, Edgar!"

"Never mind, sissy, he shall be rescued, and then he is entirely at our mercy! Amid all these clouds there is a bright ray of sunshine!"

He spoke cheerily, but his mind was filled with vague fears. The foolish old man's life might be at stake.

It was late before any news came from Billings, and consisted of a note delivered by a special messenger. It ran thus:

"Dear Sir:—The check for twenty thousand dollars is in your father's handwriting without a doubt. It is made payable to self or bearer, and was presented to the teller by a stranger two days since. Payment was refused, as the bearer failed to get identified. The following day the check came in again through the Union Bank of New Jersey. Upon examining the office check-book after you left to-day, I discovered that a blank check, numbered 2,007, had been abstracted. No one except myself and the prin-

cipal has access to it, and Mr. Alston's ways have been very strange lately. What is to be done?

"Yours obediently."

"John Billings."

While Edgar was pondering over this, Edward Hawley and a friend were announced.

The friend proved to be Detective Hawkley still in his disguise as a farmer.

"Any news?" demanded Edgar.

"Not much," replied Hawkley. "However, I have proof that your father did not go to Philadelphia to-day. After leaving you I telegraphed his description to every railway depot, and asked for his movements to be followed. No such person had reached Philadelphia up to six o'clock this evening. He has not gone there at all, Mr. Alston."

Edgar quietly handed him the note he had just received from Billings, and Hawkley whistled joyously.

"New Jersey!" he whispered. "We've got it, sir. The whole game is as simple as A, B, C, and unless we hurry up, we shall be beaten! I have no doubt that some kind of marriage ceremony will be performed, and that your father will be induced to present his bride with a check for a very large amount. The plan will then be to cash it and get away to Europe. I don't want to alarm you needlessly, Mr. Alston, but these people will not hesitate at murder!"

"I am ready to act at once. How are we to discover their retreat?"

"Let us away," Edward Hawley put in, quivering with excitement. "Every wasted moment is torture to me."

"In the first place, "Hawkley went on, "the number of

the check must be taken, and payment stopped. Your authority to the bank will be quite sufficient, Mr. Alston. Write the letter now, and mail it at once. This done, we will proceed to New Jersey."

"To-night?" cried Hawley, delightedly.

"To-night, gentlemen, and each must be armed with a six-shooter!" the detective replied, vigorously. "Remember that we may have to face our foes in their lair, and all are desperate characters—Isabel Russell the most desperate of all!"

He sprang to his feet and savagely paced the floor. Never before had the young men seen him give way to so much excitement.

In fifteen minutes the trio were in a carriage, and being taken to Twenty-third street ferry.

"Gentlemen," Hawkley said, "do not let me deceive you. If we succeed in discovering the hiding-place of Isabel Russell, Gilbert Roseberry, and Mitford Palmer, in attempting to capture them we shall carry our lives in our hands. I know these people, and they will fight like tigers. If you have any qualms of fear, do not hesitate to express yourselves, and I will obtain the aid of the police. I do not wish to do this if it can he avoided for the police are sure to blunder."

"Go right ahead!" ordered Edgar. "Remember that my father's life may be in danger."

"And a murderer's fate before me!" added Hawley, fiercely gripping his revolver.

At Jersey City Hawkley questioned the hack-drivers who stood outside the Erie depot, and learned readily that an old gentleman had been a customer that morning.

"He's been here three times, mister," his informant said. "And Jim Maber drives him quite a long ways out."

"And where is Jim Maber"?" demanded Edgar.

This question was answered by the rattling of a dilapidated carriage, a loud "Whoa!" and the frame of bones in the shafts of the vehicle came to a halt.

"Jim, yer wanted," called one of his comrades.

Jim advanced with a smirk. At the prospect of obtaining a handsome reward he became respectful. Yes, he had driven an old gentleman—a real gentleman he was, too—he had driven him to Ridgeway that very day.

"Have you the street and the number?" demanded Hawkley.

"Yes, mister."

The detective's heart bounded with savage triumph.

"Far easier than I expected," he muttered to his companion. "By Heaven, she is run to earth at last!" Then aloud: "You must drive us to the same address at once. Here's a ten-dollar bill. You shall have another when we reach our friend. And double that amount if you bring us back here in safety!"

"I took the old gentleman to the top of Hawthorne avenue every time," the hackman said, "but as he always seemed afraid of being seen, I followed him to-day to No. 33. That's where he stays."

The party entered the carriage in grim silence, but the heart of each one was bounding with half subdued excitement.

It seemed a weary journey to Ridgeway, and occupied fully an hour.

At last the vehicle came to a stand-still, just as the clocks were chiming the midnight hour, and the driver said:

"This is where the old gentleman always gets out. No. 33 is about half-way down."

"Right!" responded Hawkley. "Stay here until we return. Keep your eyes open, and if you see a policeman, tell him to follow us!"

Hawthorne avenue appeared to be purely residental, and the houses were of a high, respectable appearance. They were all detached, and surrounded by handsome lawns and gardens.

The occupants of all except No. 33 appeared to have retired for the night, and after motioning the young men to stand back, Detective Hawkley stole softly toward the front veranda, whence he could peer into a brilliantly lighted room beyond.

One minute, and he returned to his impatient companions, who were hiding in the shadow of a huge maple tree.

"Mr. Alston," he said. "Your father is there, and safe. I cannot see much through the slats of the blinds, but upon that you may rest satisfied. One thing is certain—we have arrived in good time. Now for action! It is just possible that Roseberry and Palmer are out. If so Isabel Russell and Roseberry's sister must be captured quietly and expeditiously. Then we will be in wait for the two male confederates. If we are faced by the whole of them, do not scruple to use your guns on the men. One minute and I will reconnoiter. I propose adopting the tactics of a burglar, and have with me the most modern appliances that human ingenuity can invent. You see, the professional thief is so clever that he always manages to keep a

little ahead of those who try to guard the public safety."

He took from the pocket of his coat a bag containing a dozen ingenious contrivances made of wire, and tapped it significantly, then slid away like a shadow.

Three—four—five minutes, and not a sound broke the intense silence. Suddenly a prelude was rippled over the keys of a piano, and then Queenie's well-known voice fell upon the ears of the shuddering Edgar.

Even now he had some difficulty in shaking off the witching influence of her presence!

"She is singing!" he whispered to Hawley, hoarsely. "Do you hear? Curse her! And that old man groveling at her feet!"

"Let her sing!" hissed Hawkley, who had just returned to his companions. "Her squalling could not be more opportune. I have known the time when that voice and that song would have lured me to ruin; but now I could strangle the notes in her false, white throat. Follow me; every door is locked and barred, but an entrance can easily be effected by the wooden doors of the cellar in the rear of the house. Keep well in the shadow lest some one see us from one of the windows. For years have I been waiting for this blessed moment!"

They glided away, while the voice of the siren warbled like the notes of a happy bird. It was as sweet as the singing of angels in the celestial choir.

It took but a few turns of Nathaniel Hawkley's dexterous hands to unloosen the wooden bar that held down the doors of the cellar, and the trio disappeared into the gloom below. The detective ignited a silent match, and advised the young men to take off their shoes. The cellar was of the ordinary suburban pattern. In the center was a hot-air furnace, from the sides of which a dozen octopus-like arms clutched at every corner of the floor above. At one end there was a flight of wooden stairs that led to the kitchen. To these Hawkley pointed silently, and after a moment's reflection said:

"If the door at the top of the steps is fastened, I must work cautiously. As a rule these locks are of the flimsiest make. Do not utter a sound, gentlemen, and be prepared for any surprise."

He crept softly up stairs, listened a minute, and then turned the door-knob with his left hand, while his right firmly clutched a revolver.

To his surprise and gratification the door yielded to his pressure, and he peeped into the kitchen. It was empty, but in the sitting-room beyond he fancied that he saw the shadow of a woman's figure through the partially open door-way.

Half a dozen cat-like steps, and he was bending over the sleeping form of Lucy Roseberry, who had dropped asleep, her arms and head resting on a center-table.

For one instant Hawkley regarded her with gloating eyes; then he pinioned her arms, and before she could utter more than a faint gurgling sound, she was helpless with a gag thrust between her teeth.

At sight of the three men her eyes flamed with fear and fury, and she attempted to stamp on the floor, the result being that her feet were promptly bound to the chair in which she was sitting.

"One sound," hissed Hawkley, "and it shall be your last!"

Satisfied that she could neither move nor cry out, he whispered to his companions:

"I will face her alone! You keep watch here. If the man you know as St. Leonards appears, shoot him down as mercilessly as you would a mad dog!"

He looked steadily at the young men, but there was a terrible glitter in his burning eyes.

"We understand," replied Hawley. "If you need help, a shout will bring us to you."

Queenie was still singing and playing, and Edgar Alston stood and listened like one in a maddening dream.

With one glance at Lucy, whose deathly face was filled with the fear of an awful misery, the detective passed through the gilded alcove that led to Isabel's parlor, and parting the heavy portieres, passed into the room.

Even in that brief moment, Edgar Alston saw that which was photographed into his brain forever. His heart sickened within him, then a flood of fierce anger and disgust swept like a storm of fire through his brain.

The curtains fell back into their place and the scene of his aged father fondling this accursed siren was hidden from his view.

When Hawkley walked in, Isabel favored him with a smiling glance, and half turned from the piano, while Jabez Alston scrambled to his feet.

"Er—who is this, my dear?" he demanded, with an assumption at dignity.

"Only a friend of mine who is wonderfully clever in making up, you old darling."

Jabez Alston pressed one of her hands, while Isabel gazed critically at the figure before her.

"Is it really you or not, Gilbert?" she laughed. "What a splendid hayseed you make!"

With a bitter laugh, Hawkley cast aside his shabby overcoat, the shoulders of which were padded into a huge lump. He flung his battered broad-brimmed hat to the floor, snatched away his wig and bushy whiskers and stood before her, tall and straight as a rod.

"It is not Gilbert Roseberry, Isabel Russell, but an avenger who has been on your track for years. Do you know me yet? My hair is whitened by your perfidy, but though a common policeman now—a policeman by choice for the sole purpose of running you and your paramour to earth—you may recognize in me a once successful and ambitious lawyer—your legal husband—Arthur Holliday Russell!"

He bowed mockingly.

"Eh! What, sir?" thundered Jabez Alston, springing erect. "You have made a mistake, sir! This lady is my wife! She shall not be insulted by you! Leave the room, or, old as I am, I will eject you! Isabel, my queen, deny it all. The man is mad!"

He passed one arm about her, but she did not heed him. Her eyes were fixed upon the cruel and malignant face of Hawkley, in their depths a tigerish gleam, while her breath came and went in quick little gasps. The surprise had been so sudden—so unlooked for. She was completely at bay.

"You lie!" she hissed. "You are not Lawyer Russell. His body was found in the river. Even if you are, what claim have you upon me?"

"I am an officer of the law," he returned, in sibilant

tones, "and am here to arrest you on the charge of murder! Isabel Russell, you are my prisoner! You killed Stimson, the manager of the Frivolity."

Almost before he had ceased speaking, she sprang with the agility of a wild-cat to an escritoire, wherein was secreted a pistol. One swift movement, and it was pointed full at the heart of Detective Hawkley.

"Curse you for a meddler!" she hissed, firing with deadly precision. "No mortal man shall stand in my path!"

There was a sharp report, and Hawkley pitched to the carpet, a bullet in his breast, while Jabez Alston sank limp and helpless onto a lounge before the fiendish fury who towered before him in place of the beautiful Isabel who had bewitched him!

With one glance of withering contempt, she again raised the pistol, whispering, in a voice that sounded like a serpent's hiss:

"And you, you miserable old dotard! Why should I spare you to tell tales. I have fooled you to the top of your bent, equally as I fooled your son."

"Isabel!" he gasped, in abject fear.

"Die! you maudlin old idiot!"

Jabez Alston made a dive for the portieres, just as a bullet was embedded in the wall, and plunged into the arms of his son.

With a bound, Edward Hawley reached the side of the frenzied woman and knocked the pistol from her hand.

She flew at him with the fury of a tigress, tearing his clothing and flesh with her teeth and fingers. The lovely witch was transformed into a she-devil! At sight of the

young men she seemed to realize that the game was up, and fought until she sank helpless and exhausted to the floor, a bloody foam spurting from her lips.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST OF THE SIREN.

Meanwhile, Edgar Alston was supporting the head of Hawkley on his knee, while a loud knocking and ringing of bells sounded in the hallway.

"Open the door," Hawkley said, faintly. "The neighbors have heard the shots. Send for a doctor. I am dying, but don't let yonder murderess cheat the gallows! The men—Roseberry and Palmer have gone—I was a little too late!"

Jabez Alston staggered away at a sign from his son, and admitted a burly policeman, who gazed at the scene before him with bulging eyes.

Behind him came the hackman and a few curious people who had been alarmed by the pistol reports.

"Some one fetch a doctor," cried Edgar Alston, authoritatively. "This man has been shot. Policeman, keep the room clear."

Hawkley was lifted to a lounge, and an effort was made to stop the flow of blood.

"It's all over, gentlemen," he said, smiling faintly. "She's done for me at last, but I don't think that she will escape. The game's up, and I am only sorry that I have missed Palmer and Roseberry. Promise that you will not

give up the chase. They are waiting somewhere—possibly in New York—cleverly disguised, for the woman to join them. Great Heaven! can it be that I am dying? How strange that I and that false woman should meet in this last tragedy!"

His eyes were fast glazing, and before the doctor arrived, he was dead, his last words being:

"Oh, Isabel, how I loved you in the golden days of the past, but now I loathe and curse you with my last breath!"

She heard him, a smile on her white face; and when she was assured that he would never speak again, her eyes flashed with savage satisfaction.

"I always hated him," she said, "and hate him even in death!"

When the doctor came she regarded him defiantly and motioned him aside.

"Your skill is useless here," she told him. "I am bleeding to death internally, and you know it."

"It is true," was his reply, after a brief examination.
"You will be dead within an hour."

A bitter laugh left her lips.

"Stand back and let me speak," she said. "Let me speak while I have strength."

Jabez Alston was seated in a far corner of the parlor, his eyes covered with his hands. His humiliation was almost more than he could bear.

"Don't think," continued Isabel, "that I am going to recant, or drop any maudlin tears. Had I listened to reason, I should now be on the high seas with the only man I ever cared for, Gilbert Roseberry. But I was not

satisfied until I had eased yonder hoary-headed fool of a part of his wealth. Is it not wonderful to believe that the great Jabez Alston—the Wall street financier—the flinty hearted, hard headed old fossil—is it not wonderful to believe that he was as plastic as clay in my hands?"

She laughed mirthlessly, while he writhed in agony.

"I made him love me—as I have made scores of better men, and to make sure of a goodly slice of his wealth, I have deluded him into the belief that I was his wife. We were married to-day by a sham priest, and my real husband, Gilbert Roseberry, witnessed the ceremony! Great Heaven! I believe that death is coming more quickly than I expected. Another hour would have seen me safely away, with the man I love, and yonder old dotard would have been but one more on the list of my dupes. Oh! I curse the memory of—I curse the very soul of yon masquerading Hawkley with my last breath! A hundred thousand dollars! And I shall never enjoy it! Oh, Gilbert, come back to me! Help! help!"

She sprang up as though suddenly galvanized, then fell back, gasping:

"That man"—pointing to Edward Hawley—"has done me no particular wrong. Let him not suffer for a crime of which I am guilty. I shot John Stimson—I shot him because he believed that I had fooled him. Pshaw! he was not worth it. I killed him only for the sake of sealing his lips. He had known me in the past!"

Her voice became husky, and she suddenly clutched at her white throat, her very last words being:

"Gilbert! Gilbert! The bounding seas! My love forever!"

"She is dead!" announced the solemn tones of the doc-

tor, as he covered the face, once so beautiful, but now distorted by the agonies of death.

"Terrible! terrible!" Edgar Alston whispered. "Come, father. This is no place for you."

He led the old man to another room, while Hawley and the policeman searched the house.

In one of the upper rooms there were evidences of complete preparations for disguise and flight, but no clew to the movements of Roseberry and Palmer.

"It is pretty sure, sir," the policeman said, "that it was the woman's intention to murder old Mr. Alston to-night and leave his body here."

They stumbled against another door in the passage, and as it was locked, the officer kicked it open. Here a terrible sight was revealed. Mitford Palmer, who had so cleverly personated Lord St. Leonards, lay stiff and stark in death. A white wig and spectacles had been tossed into one corner of the room, but he was wearing clerical attire. An examination showed a small bullet-hole in his left breast. There was little blood upon his clothing, and he had evidently been taken by surprise, for there were no evidences of a struggle.

"That woman again!" the policeman suggested.

"Or the man she favored," Hawley said. "They had reason to be jealous of each other, and this man was in the way of both. The truth may never be known, unless Roseberry is captured."

By this time several other policemen had arrived, and the house and Lucy Roseberry were left to their care.

From the girl nothing could be elicited but passionate sobs, and after being held for examination for two weeks,

For a few days the sensation was intense. Two or three of the great newspapers of New York devoted columns of imagination in describing the adventures of Queenie Russell; and Jabez Alston, the financier, fled to Europe to live down the unenviable notoriety that had been thrust upon him. He was a broken-hearted and disgraced man.

Though every effort was made to trace Gilbert Roseberry, nothing more was ever heard of him, and his complete obliteration was considered one of the most marvelous on record. In police circles it was declared that he had committed suicide.

Three months later there was a quiet home wedding at the Alston mansion, and the pretty daughter of the financier became Mrs. Edward Hawley.

Following this, it created little surprise in business circles when an official announcement was made that the reliable and prosperous old firm, which Jabez Alston had founded, had passed into the hands of two promising young men—his son, Edgar, and his son-in-law, Edward Hawley.

(THE END.)



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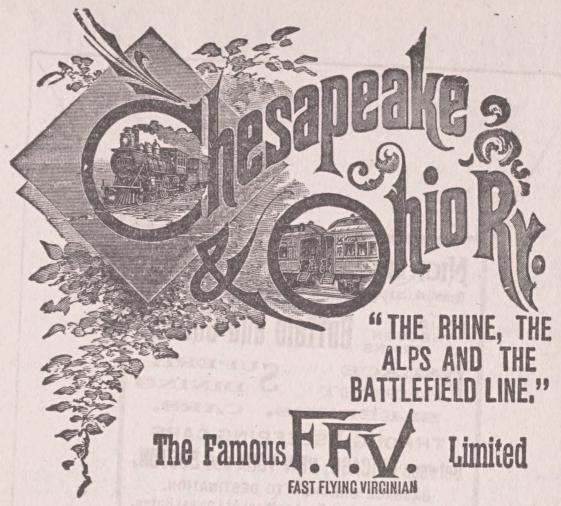
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